Michael T. Martin & Bruce Paddington

Restoration or Innovation?

Lucía

Humberto Solás's work embodies the cinematic principles and social concerns of the New Latin-American Cinema, a movement that arose in the late 1950s in response to the continent's economic and cultural dependency and underdevelopment. It is a movement that has challenged the history of cinematic representation and is committed to a social practice that opposes capitalist and foreign domination and affirms national and popular expression. Its founding filmmaker/theorists include Glauber Rocha (Brazil), Jorge Sanjinés (Bolivia), Fernando Birri (Argentina), Julio García Espinosa (Cuba), Fernando Solanas (Argentina), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Cuba), Patricio Guzman (Chile), Santiago Alvarez (Cuba), Pereira dos Santos (Brazil), and Octavio Getino (Argentina), among others. A leading film theorist and practitioner, Solás has played a central role as a mentor of young filmmakers and as a participant in the policies and practices of ICAIC, the Cuban Film Institute. His first feature film, *Lucía* (1968), is a classic of the New Latin-American Cinema in its thematic concern with the decolonization process in Cuba and in its approach to showing the processes that generate social problems while leaving the resolution open to the "active" viewer.

Solás has also made *Un día de noviembre* (1972), *Cantata de Chile* (1975), *Cecilia* (1981), *Amada* (1983), *Un hombre de éxito* (1986), *El siglo de las luces* (1991), and several experimental and short- and medium-length fictional and documentary films, including *Variaciones* (1962), *Minerva traduce el mar* (1963), *Manuela* (1966), *Simparelé* (1974), *Wifredo Lam* (1979), and *Obataleo* (1988). Solás is currently working on a new feature film, *Miel para Ochún*. His

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An Interview with Humberto Solás: Post-Revolutionary Cuban Cinema

films constitute a body of work that thematically addresses colonization and decolonization in cultural and psychological terms; features innovative camera work, elaborate set designs, stylized acting, and a Baroque visual style; and emphasizes symbolism, surrealism, location in spatial and temporal terms, and music as a narrative form.

In his seminal essay "Por un cine imperfecto" (1970), Cuban filmmaker and film theorist Julio García Espinosa (one of the founders of ICAIC) warned of the temptation for Cuban cinema to transform itself into what he called "perfect cinema"—a cinema that is technically and artistically masterful, yet reactionary. Espinosa wrote his polemic during the period in which two of the most important Cuban films were produced: Solás's *Lucía* and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968), which defined and supported the ideals of the Cuban revolution. These films, among others, represent the birth of the Golden Age of Cuban filmmaking: the mid- to late 60s. Humberto Solás was one of its brightest and most accomplished practitioners. *Lucía* demonstrated a flair for epic storytelling in an experimental narrative structure that featured three distinct cinematic styles: symbolism, 30s realism, and comic social realism. Despite his youth (he was 26) when he made the film, Solás was immediately acknowledged as one of Cuba's most influential directors, and he proved to be crucial in promoting a radically new vision. He and other pioneering Latin-American filmmakers created a cinema that would contribute to the recovery of their national identities, cultures, and histories.

Solás expressed the theme of anti-colonial struggles in *Cantata de Chile,* asserting his solidarity with the New Latin-American Cinema movement and acknowledging that during the period of the 1960s and 70s, Cuban cinema shared common concerns with its Latin-American neighbors. He argues now, though, that the movement has lost its ideological cohesion and thematic focus. Solás is also one of the few Cuban filmmakers to have explored the relationship of Cuba to the wider Caribbean—his interpretative docudrama, *Simparelé,* explores the history of popular struggle in Haiti, while the later *El siglo de las luces* examines the impact of the French and Haitian revolutions in Cuba, Martinique, and Guadeloupe. His goal is to make culturally and politically relevant films that are neither technically inferior nor aimed at a small elite, films

that critically, but without didacticism, engage a popular audience.

Solás's ruminations about the relationship of cinema to national identity within the Cuban and Latin-American contexts and the importance of race and gender in the formation of Cuban identity contribute to the continuing debate about national cinemas. *Cecilia,* adapted from the classic nineteenth-century Cuban novel *Cecilia Valdés,* alludes to racial syncretism and hybridity in the formation of the Cuban nation. The African presence in Cuba is also explored in *Obatalea.* Solás additionally addresses the status of women in Cuban society. He claims an analogy can be drawn between women and the Cuban nation, but he rejects feminist didacticism, admiring instead the work of filmmaker Sara Gómez, whose seminal *De cierta manera* (1974-77) conveys a particular feminine view while focusing on the wider societal issue of marginality.

In addition to the relational issues of race, gender, and national identity, Solás recognizes the historical, cultural, and hegemonic influences of Hollywood and North America. Although several of his films appear to model the classic Hollywood film with their emphasis on suspense, spectacle, melodrama, and stylized acting, they do not represent the "perfect cinema" that Espinosa criticized because they are so deeply embedded in the Cuban reality. With their concern for the viewer's historical and political consciousness, they oppose the Hollywood model of filmmaking, in which storytelling conforms to a formulaic standard and is driven by predictable crises and resolutions.

For Solás, Hollywood's "dream machine" constitutes a form of cultural imperialism which he equates with "ecological genocide." Ironically, he recognizes how the U.S. embargo has played a major role in radicalizing Cuba's cultural institutions, particularly in developing an original alternative cinema, but he is critical of the bureaucratic practices and conservative tendencies that, during periods of the revolution, stifled artistic development. Solás remains committed to an innovative cinema. While he defends the position that there is no place in the Cuban film industry for the production of films that are anti-revolutionary, his own films still retain a fiercely independent artistic vision and stance. He acknowledges the importance of oppositional films in Cuba, and argues that although these films may be critical of certain practices in the revolution, they do not oppose the revolution itself.

Solás's journey parallels that of ICAIC, which was established as the first cultural decree of the Revolution fewer than three months after the Provisional Government was formed in 1959. Envisioned as an independent body and empowered to create and manage a national film industry, ICAIC's mandate was also to contribute to the creation of socialism in Cuba. It lost its autonomy in 1976 and became dependent on the Ministry of Culture until 1988. In the late 1960s and early 70s, Solás was challenged by conservative ideologues, which delayed production of his more personal and introspective film, *Un día de noviembre,* until 1972. The threat of censorship and self-censorship continued, and for several years during the early to mid-70s, Solás was unable to complete a film. At the same time, Cuba was experiencing a major economic crisis that severely limited film production. (During this period, Solás studied history at the University of Havana, where he wrote several theoretical essays on film and theater.) But, like ICAIC, Solás survived these challenges, and he continues both to make feature films and documentaries and to train and mentor young filmmakers, especially women.

He believes that Cuban filmmakers should find new collective approaches to reconceptualize the cinematic premises of their work, thus ensuring their social relevance and cultural uniqueness. Although, with the continuing adverse economic conditions, Cuban film production has increasingly become dependent on co-productions, Solás still emphasizes the need for an autonomous and critical national cinema (along with an alternative film and video movement), arguing that it can exist in and outside of ICAIC and official circles and contribute to a dynamic and revitalized Cuban cinema, to which he as an artist remains passionately committed.

[This interview incorporates two interviews (1993 in Puerto Rico and 1999 in Ohio) with remarks made during Solás's participation in a film symposium, *Imagining the Caribbean: Aesthetics, Identity, and Location,* held at Bowling Green State University, Ohio.]

MICHAEL T. MARTIN & BRUCE PADDINGTON: *Let's begin this discussion with the period of the 1960s and your first feature.* Lucía *is an experimental film—would you discuss its structure and distinct styles?*
HUMBERTO SOLÁS: Yes, it is an absolutely experimental film. It is based on a very controversial premise: to make three films in one, in which each episode represents a distinct conception of film and photographic style: one of song, one of catharsis, and the other that reflects the obsessions of my life at the time. I was also influenced by the memories of writings that haunted me, by the impact of the Italian neo-realist filmmakers,

The different styles of *Lucía* (above and right)

the French *nouvelle vague*, and the cinéma-vérité and the English free cinema movements.

Lucía was the summation and the expression of all the influences in my life of literature, cinematography, and sculpture. It was well received by the public and, along with *Memorias del subdesarrollo* by Alea, it is emblematic of a very fertile period, the late 1960s, that we cannot forget—a period in which Manuel Octavio Gómez made *La primera carga al machete* [1969], and in which Santiago Alvarez completed his first long documentary, *Hanoi martes 13* [1967]. I believe that this period was the most expressive and innovative one in the development of filmmaking in Cuba because we searched for and invoked the strongest and most dynamic aspects of our national culture. All the directors created very interesting works, and the talents of Nicolás Guillén, Sara Gómez, and Sergio Giral were realized. In short, it was an intense and interesting moment because the revolution was still very nationalistic and autochthonous, and concerned with affirming its legitimacy. And, while *Lucía* was my personal creation, it was also part of this revolutionary moment, affirming our national culture and search for originality.

Were there political problems with its reception abroad?

Well, Cuba's relations with the United States were adversarial during this period. There was strong opposition, especially from the United States, to promoting and distributing our cultural work abroad. Despite this, the international reception of *Lucía* was very good. It was selected for the Directors Fortnight at the Cannes

Film Festival; it premiered at the Moscow Film Festival in 1969 and won the international critics prize.

Were there problems in the 1970s that affected film production in Cuba?
Yes, because of the country's economic problems and the political leadership's alignment with world socialism. Cuba is a non-industrialized Third World country, and we were dependent on the assistance of other countries. The socialist bloc offered to help and support Cuban cinema. While it is true that there were positive cultural influences from abroad, especially those from the socialist countries that opposed social realism, there were also negative ones from European socialist countries. These negative influences contributed to the dismantling of some of our original cultural projects and to the cultural immobility that characterized the period in sculpture and theater, among other arts. While the spiritual life of the country regressed until the late 1970s, the cultural life remained high. And although the general view of the decade is seen as an exciting one, only a few films were made, notable among them Alea's *La última cena* [1977] and Gómez's *De cierta manera*.

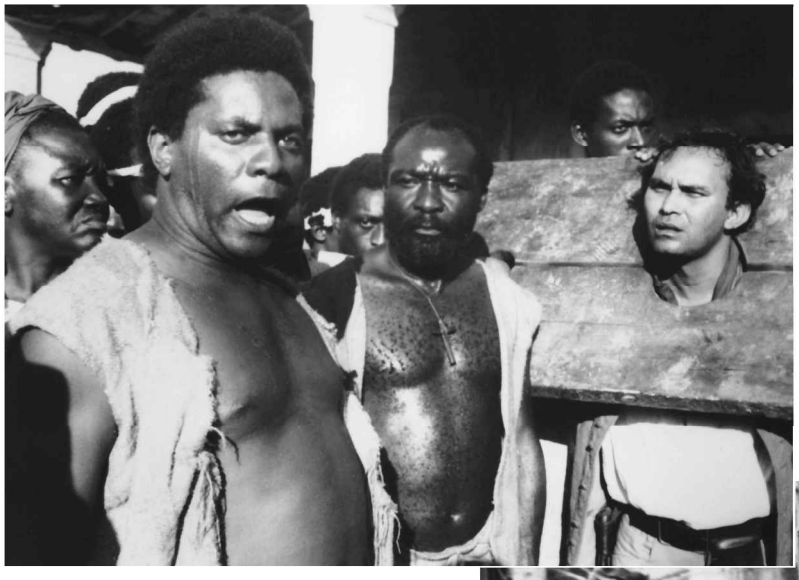
During this period did you have problems completing and exhibiting your films?
Yes. *Un día de noviembre* was made between 1969 and 1970 but was not released until 1972. The problem with this film, which is about the despair of a young Cuban revolutionary who discovers that he has a fatal illness, was that it is a metaphor for the spiritual crisis of the revolution. The film was considered pessimistic because it revealed somber and melancholic aspects of reality. I did not participate in the social realism scene that was prevalent in national life then. I am certain that ICAIC withheld the film from exhibition because Cuban cultural life was very polemical and polarized during this period of the revolution.

The Cuban left, like the left in any country, has many different orientations and wings. The revolution may appear as a monolithic event, unique and uniform, but it has always been as much cultural as it is economic, reflecting multiple and opposing polemics. On the cultural level, the progressive revolutionaries coexisted with those who had conservative tendencies. One group pursued the practices of social realism in cinema and painting, while the other, cosmopolitanism, subordinated national heritage, believing that Cuba should integrate itself into world culture, although the cosmopolitan wing later denied the centrality of the international sphere. I belong to another group that is based at ICAIC but affiliated with the Casa de las Américas, an institution that has struggled for over 35 years to establish a progressive culture in Cuba. I believe in progressive experimental art, when you want to arrive at a relative truth based on circumstance without heavy didacticism.

Did you experience any problems being part of the group that was associated with the Casa de las Américas?
As I noted earlier, the period of the 1970s was very controversial and many artists were silenced. I was silenced for several years. These reactionary groups dominated cultural life. They stopped the progressive movement of Cuban culture.

What happened after this period? Was there a change in the 80s?
Yes, in the 80s it was better. Under Armando Hart, the Ministry of Culture tried to reconstruct Cuban culture and make it revolutionary again. Hart rehabilitated many artists who had been, if not persecuted, silenced during the 70s. In not advocating a mechanistic conception of cultural life, Hart created an opening or space for young painters, writers, and actors and film directors. As a result of his efforts, an artistic explosion occurred in the 80s. In the cinema, the Asociación Hermanos Sáiz, who were members of a parallel group that often challenged the activities of ICAIC, made their first film. In fact, during this period many different views and perspectives were manifest at the center of Cuban cinema. One tendency was to make commercial cinema, another culturally progressive cinema. Between these two tendencies, young artists were producing experimental films. By 1986, all of these currents were subsumed under one popular orientation. I contributed to this process with the feature film *Un hombre de éxito,* which is a social criticism of the retelling of history. It was made with a desire to communicate directly with the public.

Other films of great artistic strength that signaled a new generation of filmmaking in Cuba include Orlando Rojas's *Papeles secundarios* [1989], Geraldo Chijona's *Adorables mentiras* [1991], Sergio Giral's *María Antonia* [1990], and Enrique Pineda Barnet's *La bella del Alhambra* [1989]. This was a period of great artistic richness and development. Unfortunately, the revitalization of Cuban cinema, which began to achieve the same efficiency that we had in the 1960s, declined because of the "special period," the dissolution of socialism world-wide, and the debilitating effects on the Cuban economy of the U.S. blockade. However, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea directed (with Juan Carlos Tabio) *Fresa y chocolate* [1994] and Tabio, *La*



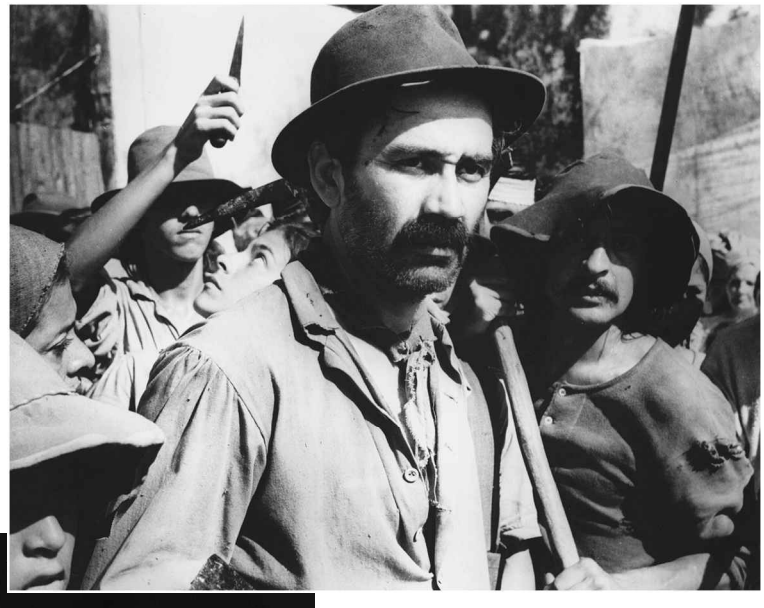
La ultima cena, dir. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea

De cierta manera, dir. Sara Gómez

bicicleta y el elefante [1995]. The two films critically analyze our past and present. A very polemical film that provoked a crisis in ICAIC was made by Daniel Díaz Torres, *Alicia en el país de las maravillas* [1991]. The film was censored and this resulted in revisions of the structure of ICAIC. The directors and the technicians protested these policies and ICAIC regained its autonomy. Thus, the period of the late 1980s to the early 1990s was a very fertile, rich, and polemical period in the development of Cuban cinema.

How has the recent political situation impacted cultural and intellectual life in Cuba and filmmaking in particular?

The fact that we don't have official relations with the United States has radicalized our artistic and aesthetic activities, particularly in the cinema. In the past 40 years, if we had had a constructive relationship between our countries, perhaps Cuban cinema would be less original. I don't want to say that I favor what has happened and that I agree with our diplomatic relations of



Cantata de Chile
(above and left)

the past 40 years. However, everything that has negative aspects also has positive ones, and the positive side of this relationship is that it has contributed to the search for our identity as a nation. It has contributed to a cinematographic development that is original and autonomous. Yet during these four decades many mistakes were made because the authorities considered the influence of North American culture to be antithetical to the interests of the country. This period did not last very long, but with all its negative aspects, including the internal criticism of relations between the two nations, it enabled us to mature and reaffirm our national spirit and identity through culture.

Relations between our countries are now, at the cultural level, less adversarial. I believe that relations between the United States and Cuba can be divided into two periods: one in which relations were ruptured on a governmental level and the other in which reconciliation is occurring on a cultural level. But if we did not have the period of prohibition, we would not have reached the second phase with maturity. North American culture has set the standard for this century: it has dominated fashion, music, and customs. In a small country like Cuba struggling to achieve a national identity, the political conditions that distanced our two countries enabled us to make our own journey and de-

cisions unfettered by the North American influence—an influence that is truly attractive and full of great models.

Three production groups at ICAIC were established during this period that replaced the authority of the central executive. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea led one, Manuel Pérez another, and I led the third group. The three groups evaluated the narrative treatments of the movies, and with the heads of the film industry, made production decisions. Recently, however, leaders of the Cuban Communist party have been critical of our role as filmmakers in Cuba. It's a very old story that has existed since ICAIC was first created. The problem is that the revolution never defined a cultural strategy. Obviously the revolution does not permit artistic expression of a counter-revolutionary type. It possesses this fundamental logic and it does not support opposition of an extreme form. However, if we consider the experience of Cuban cinema as a socialist cinema, in the context of the Caribbean and Latin America, it has been quite free to develop. And this is largely because of the fortitude of its creators, Alfredo Guevara, Julio García Espinosa, and Santiago Alvarez, who were the avant-garde, ensuring our cinema's integrity and distinctiveness from the formulaic traditions of the Soviet cinema.

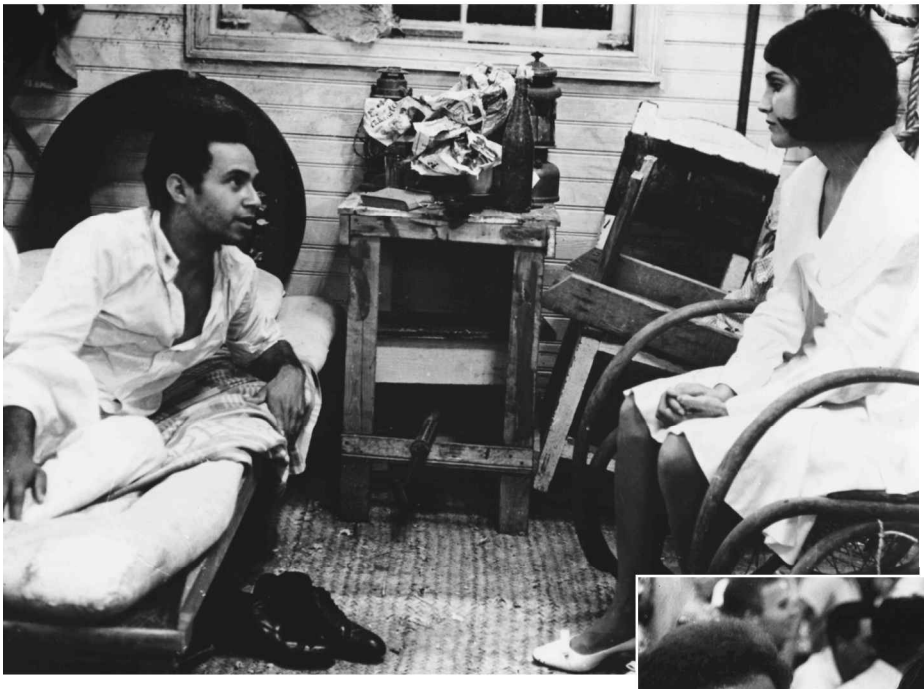
Is there an alternative video movement in Cuba and does it operate independently of ICAIC and/or other state organizations?
Yes, an alternative video movement exists. Generally it works independently. It's a movement that I am very interested in because it is where artistic innovations have emerged. In fact, it is a movement in which very interesting iconoclastic and unorthodox things happen. There is a certain rebellion against the established Cuban cinema that instead of making me angry, provokes enthusiasm because I learn quite a bit from it. Also, the economic crisis in Cuba is such that compared to what it was previously, there are few resources to make films or videos.

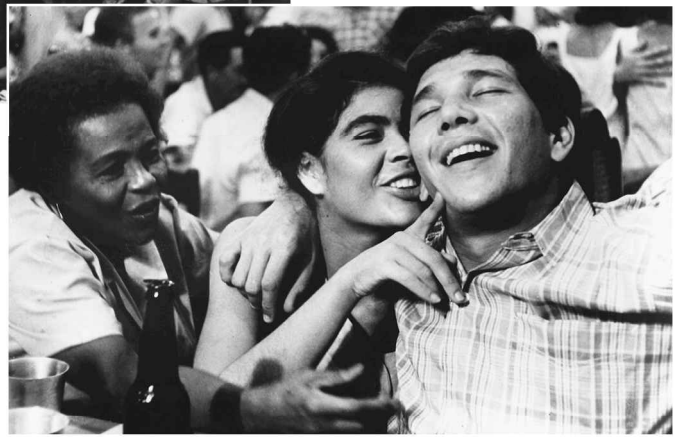
Is it in counterpoint and competition with ICAIC or does it co-exist with ICAIC?
It depends on the director. There are directors who first make videos to favorably impress the authorities in order to enter the film industry—or what used to be an industry—and work as an assistant director. And there are directors in the alternative film and video sector who are truly alternative and not interested in becoming part of ICAIC because they don't agree with the established principles of film language. There really are not many filmmakers in this group because Cuban film is very respected by young people in the country. For example, the film *La vida es silbar* is alternative cinema even though it was produced by ICAIC. That is to say that the official Cuban cinema is inclusive of alternative cinema because it is not strictly orthodox. It is a transgressive cinema, a cinema that does not follow official directives. This independent spirit and character of our cinema has been created by the filmmakers who have struggled against those groups in the country who have an absolutely closed vision about the role of culture in the revolution.

In First-World countries, alternative cinema is often associated with oppositional cinema. Do these filmmakers aligned with the alternative video/film movement produce works that are critical of government policies? Are they allowed to exhibit their work?
First, we must analyze your concept of "opposition." While there are many forms of opposition, two are fundamental. One form is critical of the practices of the revolution, the other of the revolution itself. In Miami, where there is open opposition to the revolution, a few films were made. However, cinema that is opposed to the revolution doesn't exist in Cuba, while cinema that is critical of some of its practices does, and ICAIC produces it. And the alternative cinema in Cuba also produces it. I repeat, it is not that the cinema which criticizes what is badly done in the revolution is supported or solicited by the government. It exists because we, the Cuban filmmakers, present it in our works.

Have the economic conditions you described earlier adversely impacted film production and caused ICAIC to increasingly enter into co-productions?
Certainly, this is a major problem. There is no longer an economic base for film production. What domestic resources exist are used exclusively for the *operas primas* of new directors. I agree with this position. I think it's a good idea as long as the decision to support a young director is not based on a whim, which has happened in the past. The decision should be based on the director's work in experimental film at our film school.

For established filmmakers there is not a single cent for production. We are obliged to seek co-productions. If a film project is not co-produced, it will not be made. Cuban filmmaking could very well disappear if not for co-productions. So, if I, Humberto Solás, want to make a film, it must be co-produced, and if I don't secure sponsors outside of Cuba, I will be unable to make the film. However, foreign investors





Lucia
(above and right)

in co-productions want to either impose their conception of our reality or promote themes and narratives that are openly critical of Cuba. It is especially difficult now for a foreign co-producer to make a film in Cuba because she/he is looking to make a profit. With a few notable exceptions, it is very difficult to find a producer who wants to invest in a film about the Cuban reality and not tell the director what to do or what point of view to take. For all of these reasons there aren't many films produced. As filmmakers, we are on very difficult terrain. I have, however, been fortunate with two co-productions in which I did not have to make compromises. I am now preparing two film projects with financial support from abroad. In neither of these cases is there interference. I should add that European television, especially in France and Germany, and some European independent directors have consistently supported Cuban film production.

Do co-productions undermine the concept and practices of a national cinema?

No, they don't have to. *Cecilia* is a film with a nationalistic theme that was co-produced with Spain. *El siglo de las luces,* which is a film about the impact of the French Revolution in the Caribbean, was co-produced with France, Spain, and Russia. On those occasions when concessions were demanded, I have preferred not to make such films.

You have stated that Cuban filmmakers have maintained professional relations with other Latin-American filmmakers. Is this still the case, or have things changed?

I believe that at this time Latin-American cinema is not very vigorous. Along with Cuba, Latin-American societies have been greatly transformed. The issues that we shared in common are no longer the same. Also, the conditions that justified this unity were based on a process of constructing a national identity within the context of a pan-Latin-American identity. But this stage has now passed. When I began with film, Glauber Rocha was also just starting to film. All of us, dispersed

throughout Latin America, discovered the same things about our identities as Cubans, Brazilians, or Argentinians. It was a moment of discovery and reaffirmation. This process has ended.

In what ways is national identity expressed in Cuba?
It is everywhere in literature, music, film, and in religion. There exists the idea of *cubanía* that has always been a problematic and contentious concept. It is very problematic even now, and it does not mean a homogeneity of views and perspectives. The Cuban nation is a big tree with two branches: one integrates the western part of the island and the other integrates the eastern part. The eastern part, which is the part of Santiago de Cuba, has a conception of Cuban identity that is antagonistic to the western part, Havana's. The Santiago part is influenced by a form of *caudillismo* that links Cuba to the rest of Latin America, while the Havana part is cosmopolitan and drawn to North America and Europe; it is idealistic and more democratic than Santiago. This dichotomy, though, has a unity which is the Cuban nation and identity. This is further complicated by the exodus of Cubans from the island and the Cuban diaspora. Presently, the Cuban nation is becoming more sophisticated, polyvalent, and multifaceted.

Have you incorporated these ideas about pan-Latin America and national identity into your films?
Yes. *Lucía* and *Cantata de Chile* are films about Cuban identity in relation to Latin America. I am very proud to be among the few Cuban filmmakers, in the second half of this century, who have also tried to show the relationship between our identity and the rest of the Caribbean. For example, *Simparelé,* a docudrama about Haitian history, was filmed in the Creole language of Haiti, and my last feature film, *El siglo de las luces,* concerns the impact of the Haitian Revolution in the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe during the eighteenth century.

Cecilia is another film that deals directly with the topic of identity; it is about the racial and cultural syncretism of the Cuban nation. Until the end of the first half of this century, there were very strong negative tendencies against the African presence in Cuba. It was believed by many Cubans that the African oral tradition was of no cultural value to society and that it had been replaced by Hispanic culture. This is an idea that a dominant population group uses to legitimize its privileges in society. And, of course, it was the white sector of Cuban society which benefited from control of the country's economy. In spite of the fact that I made this movie in 1982 and in spite of the commotion that it created, many of the criticisms were not directly against the film. At the very heart of those criticisms was a masked racism, because the film affirmed the racial syncretism of the Cuban nation.

The construction of race in Cuba is especially polemical with regard to the mulatto. On the one hand, the mulatto embodies the success of syncretism, while on the other, the mulatto is represented as a focus of antagonism. This is very bizarre and not a very nice aspect of our history. Why this aberration? Because in Cuba, many mulattoes married whites in order to move up the social ladder, even at the expense of their spiritual growth. In *Cecilia,* there is a very pathetic scene when the grandmother tells Cecilia, "Marry a white guy and in that way we can improve the race." Although this statement is absolutely monstrous, the idea of improving the race in this manner was quite normal until very recently. Generally, this belief has ended. Today, interracial couples are very common, and if you are mulatto or black, you are no longer denied any privileges in society. One's race is neither an advantage nor disadvantage. This is one of the positive aspects of modernity in Cuba, as well as the advances of women in society. Of course, there is often a distance between the legal position and social practices, but generally these old premises have vanished, replaced by a new social consciousness.

You may well be wondering why a person like myself, who has dedicated so much of his energy addressing the issues of national and pan-Latin-American identities, is reworking or reinventing these concepts. The reason is that once the Cuban nation found its own identity, the ideological premises that contributed to the concept of the nation did not necessarily involve happiness.

What is the relationship between cinema and nationhood?
I believe that the second half of this century has been dominated by audiovisual media. Even if the United States had little or no international presence and if Hollywood did not exist, I don't believe that any Latin-American country would have developed a mature concept of itself as a nation unless it produced its own films. Artistic culture is an essential element in the configuration of the idea of nationhood. I used to think that it was political ideas and the economic system that determined and defined the nation. Certainly they are critical contributing elements, but the concept of nation is configured in film, literature, and poetry, and is not definitively articulated until signified through the images and sounds of the country. In this century this is an imperative.

The relationship between nationhood as a social fact and how it is signified cinematically is not a uniform one and does not necessarily occur in the same time and space. It is neither a synchronic nor a diachronic process. What I do believe, though, is that if you are unable to create a cinematic image of the nation, you cannot, in the modern world and among the polity, project nationhood. Cuba is neither a new nor an innocent nation. It is a laboratory that has incorporated ideas from socialism, fascism, Communism, etc. In this century, Cuba has made extraordinary achievements and we have the right to do everything necessary to build a nation with a creative spirit.

Progressive filmmakers have long sought to develop a cinema that recovers a people's history, culture, and identity. Is this still possible under the continuing U.S. presence in an era of globalization?

This is a question that answers itself. As filmmakers, we have participated in the epic adventure of finding our roots and our identity. It is fundamentally a transgressive act. There is no Latin-American filmmaker who has not participated in this search for self. It is a cinematographic experience that is self-reflexive. However, we have to find new collective approaches, but this does not mean that we have to make historical compromises. Our collective perspective is what distinguishes us from Anglo-American filmmaking. Latin-American film is nothing like Hollywood. The Anglo-American aesthetic model is fundamentally based on one that has little to do with social reality. That is why they call it "the dream machine." You can see in the Hollywood tradition that while the characters and actions may be drawn from reality, their lives are decontextualized. This rarely occurs in Latin-American film. Even in the Latin-American film that borrows from the surrealist tradition, such as the work of Buñuel, the characters are not abstractions.

The themes of our work are concerned with social dissatisfaction, which is not to be confused with pessimism. Our Latin-American colleagues have spent the past 30 years proposing ways of changing their reality, but they have not been successful. Since we do not want to follow their approach, we have to reconceptualize the cinematic premises of our own work to ensure its cultural relevance and uniqueness.

Many of your films feature women protagonists and address women's issues. Why?

I come from a country steeped in machismo, where sexist attitudes are still perpetuated, even by many women. You must understand that Cuba has always been a very stratified society in which the relationship of women and men is defined in terms of power and subordination. It was a traumatized society. Within this paternalistic structure, pleasure was derived from the subordination of women and blacks. After the revolution, it was not easy to transcend this legacy. While the revolution legalized the equality of women, in practice these obligations were not fulfilled because the sexist attitudes of individuals cannot be eradicated by decree. It is part of our national drama of not being able to transcend these gender and racial prejudices.

It is true that many of my films have dealt with women's issues, although I have never objectified women. I believe that an analogy can be drawn between women and the Cuban nation. Perhaps I have romanticized this relationship, which has a paternalistic connotation. In Cuba, there is a tradition of female iconography, and many novels and paintings deal with the feminine image. A woman is more transparent and expressive. She does not have to repress her feelings and be as restricted by social codes as men are. I find in a woman's face the contours that reveal the contradictions of her reality in society. But I feel guilty in saying this because how can you make films about women if you do not start with the premise of the female experience? Perhaps this is why I like films by women that are not necessarily focused on women's issues.

De cierta manera, by Sara Gómez, is not a film about the condition of women. It is about marginality in Cuban society during the revolution. While it conveys a particular feminine point of view, it does not have an explicit didacticism. The subject of feminism parallels that of identity. Insofar that women are unable to achieve equality with men, they will produce films about women's issues. Similarly, countries that do not have a consolidated national identity will make films about national issues. In *Lucía,* I made the analogy between women and the nation. It depicts a period, in the first two episodes, when women occupied a secondary position in society. After 40 years of the revolution, 65 percent of women are in technical occupations, and there are more women than men in education and medicine. Given these changes, it doesn't any longer make sense for me to make films about the role of women in our society.

My films are not women's films. They are about our culture and our society and are my attempt to deal honestly with women's and men's roles. I will no longer make films of this type because I think that women should make them. And I believe that the films women make should not be made for essentialist reasons. I hope that the films that are made by women

Videoteca del Sur, Inc., New York

El siglo de las luces

consider Sara Gómez's work as a model. Gómez was black and she was a woman. She must have been discriminated against. Despite this, she was able to address the broader issues of marginality, including race and gender in her work. If women filmmakers, on the other hand, assume an essentialist approach, they undermine their demand for equality. At any rate, I feel very uncomfortable talking about this issue because I have been a victim of many prejudices myself and I question whether I have the right to discuss this when women should be the ones first to speak.

Would you discuss your latest feature film?
El siglo de las luces concerns the corruption of revolutionary ideals during the period of the French and Haitian revolutions. It is organized into three movements in which each movement corresponds to a stage of a revolutionary process. The film is a meditation on contemporary Cuba, developed along the lines of Carpentier's novel.

What is the film's relevance to the 1990s?
As a metaphor for the 1990s, the film is a critique of the errors of the Cuban revolution and the restoration of convention in Cuba, and of the failure of socialism in Europe.

Did this situation cause some Cuban artists, such as the filmmaker Sergio Giral, to go into exile?
I respect Sergio Giral's decision. I wouldn't be able to do it because I feel committed to the Cuban reality. I play an active role in national life. I have made films in this environment and I believe that it is unfair to abandon my country that is in an economic crisis. I believe that the revolution is in a moment of crisis. Like Gutiérrez Alea, I am critical of the present situation but I have decided to remain in Cuba and participate in the destiny of my country.

What's next in your professional life?
My new film is based on a script that I wrote and is called *Miel para Ochún*. It is an ICAIC production. I don't know what I will be interested in tomorrow. Fortunately, before I die it seems that I will see the reemergence of the avant-garde. It would be great if I could spend the last years of my life watching films by young people and hearing what they have to say, filmmakers whose aspirations are not to have a villa or a castle with a swimming pool. I think that filmmaking can become a type of religion, as it was when I was 20 years old. This is all I have to say.

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David E. James

Im Kwon-Taek

Korean National Cinema and Buddhism

—for Mi-kyong

In 1926 Han Yong-un, an eminent Buddhist master and leader in the movement to free Korea from Japanese occupation, published a collection of poems, *Silence of Love* (*Nimŭi ch'immuk*), in which he assumed the persona of a woman abandoned by her lover.[1] In the title poem, she looks out across the mountains and the path through them by which he left her; but, with the dialectical logic of Buddhism, she finds in her loss the implication of its opposite, and so concludes by affirming her anticipation of reunion with him. *Silence of Love* is usually read as a religious and political allegory, with the absent lover figuring both the void at the heart of Buddhist ontology and the Korean national homeland seized by the Japanese invaders.

Twenty years later, a similar scene occurs in Yun Yong-gyu's film *Home Is Where the Heart Is* (*Maŭmŭi kohyang,* 1948), made during the period of political turmoil that led to the division of the nation and the colonization of the South by the United States, and one of only two Korean films from before the civil war that still survive. In this film the erotic metaphor is Oedipalized. To-song, a young boy being raised by the monks at Chongnam temple, desperately awaits the return of his mother, who has abandoned him and now lives in Seoul. He asks an old woodcutter if his mother is beautiful, and when he hears that she is, he raises his eyes to the mountains that surround him, to the peaks and the forests which we see from his point of view. As these figure both his mother's beauty and her absence, To-song's scopophilic gaze (like Han's lyric voice) makes palpable and present that which is missing—a function that has been proposed as fundamental to the cinematic signifier and its Oedipal operation, and one that the film's narrative will confirm by bringing him a surrogate mother who is nevertheless invested with all the erotic intensity of a lover.

Thirty years later, the same motifs of loss and restoration begin to pass obsessively through the films of Im Kwon-Taek. In his mature work, Im explores pre-colonial cultural forms in order to engage the question of Korean national identity, especially as it has been alienated and thrown into crisis by the multiple forms of colonization to which the country has been subject. Of the traditional cultural vocabularies Im interrogates, Buddhism will be the one considered in de-

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Come, Come, Come Upward

tail here; like Han and Yun, he mobilizes the resonant metaphors of eroticism and landscape that Buddhism contains, though the quite different historical conditions of the three artists ensured that those metaphors would be differently inflected. But before turning to Im's use of Buddhism, we must consider his confrontation with what, for a filmmaker, is an especially immediate form of alienation—that is, a national cinema subject to neo-colonial political control and censorship, and marginalized by the global hegemony of the American capitalist film industry. We begin, then, with Im's attempt to turn the colonized Korean film industry into a vehicle of national culture.

Korean National Cinema: Im Kwon-Taek as Auteur

Although the theoretical status of the concepts of the art film, national cinema, and the director-as-author has been largely undermined, practically they continue to organize scholarship. Even so, one cannot approach a Korean auteur and a Korean art cinema committed to national reconstruction in the general terms of these concepts without some justification in an account of the material conditions of film production in South Korea.

Designating a number of locally specific variants either within or on the edges of studio production, the concept of the art film mediates between the division of labor of the industrial feature film and the personal expressivity associated with authorship in avant-garde or independent films. Although the South Korean film industry has been consistently market-driven (rather than government-subsidized in the manner of, for example, the German or Taiwanese New Wave), its structure has been unstable, oscillating between the proliferation of small, more or less independent studios and government attempts to control these by forcing them into conglomerates. The absence of a stable infrastructure is commonly bemoaned by Korean critics, especially since government censorship inhibited whatever ideological flexibility or variety the dispersion of production might otherwise have allowed. The first break in this control occurred in the mid-1980s, during the *minjung* period, when a populist alliance of

workers, peasants, and factions of the middle class joined to oppose the authoritarian state, leading to a liberalization of the political climate and eventually to a democratically elected government.[2]

The cultural component of *minjung* included a generation of young filmmakers who emerged from the university cineclubs to create an underground, agitational cinema known as the "small-film movement" (*chagŭn yŏnghwa undong*). Some of these activists founded their own small companies, allowing them to explore political themes in the often very illustrious features that have gained international recognition as the Korean New Wave: Park Kwang-Su's *To the Starry Island* (*Kŭ Sŏme kago shiptt'a,* 1993) and *A Single Spark* (*Arŭmdaun ch'ŏng'nyŏn Chŏn T'ae-il,* 1995) are outstanding examples.[3] The authorial expressiveness allowed by this mode of production emerged, however, in the shadow, and often within the stylistic vocabularies, of Im Kwon-Taek's earlier auteurist attempt to fashion a Korean art cinema capable of addressing national issues, one that was made under entirely different, fundamentally circumscribed industrial conditions.

Im has only occasionally had anything like the autonomy of the New Wave directors. During the 1960s and 1970s, he worked for small, usually short-lived studios that were dependent on immediate market returns and generally not able to sustain long-term commitments of the kind that allowed an innovative directorial style to mature.[4] But still, they had more in common with the director-driven system of the American silent cinema than with the producer- or package-driven practices that replaced it. In the system where Im learned his craft, once topics were approved by the studio, directors generally had immediate and more or less complete responsibility for all stages of production—writing, cinematography, and editing, as well as directing. In this situation, where industrial genre production to some degree resembled Western art cinema, Im was able to develop the range of skills that makes his designation as an auteur credible later in his career, when he was able to choose his own topics.

Other specifically Korean conditions also shaped his development. A 1973 revision to the motion picture law giving the producers of what were designated as "quality" film more privileges in importing Hollywood money-makers coincided with Im's desire to shift the direction of his work, and he quickly became known as a director of quality films. The relaxation of censorship in the 1980s allowed him to raise, if not deeply probe, previously proscribed political issues, though typically in a historically distanced, allegorical form: the story of the nineteenth-century Tonghak nativist uprising, *Fly High, Run Far* (*Kaebyŏk,* 1991), for example, was read as referring to the contemporary student movement. But behind Im's emergence as a singularly prolific and distinctive director was the length and success of his studio work—95 films in 34 years—and the unusual range of responsibilities it centralized in one person. He had already made 50 features in this system when, in 1973, a crisis of conscience set him on the path to the art film: "One day I suddenly felt as though I'd been lying to the people for the past 12 years. I decided to compensate for my wrongdoings by making more honest films."[5]

After this crisis, which Im has described in several interviews, he envisaged his subsequent career in two streams. He would continue to make genre films for mass consumption, and in return his producers agreed to allow these to subsidize his "honest" films without expecting them all to make a profit. The distinction between the two streams turned out to be anything but categorical. The very profitable action film *The General's Son* (*Chang'gunŭi adŭl,* 1990) and its sequels contain many motifs in common with the art films considered here, while Im's "honest" films still mobilize the hoariest melodramatic conventions. And *Sopyonje* (*Sŏp'yŏnje,* 1993), Im's masterpiece and the most fully realized of his personal projects, which he never expected to be a commercial success, turned out to be the most profitable domestic film in Korean history until the blockbuster *Shiri* (*Swiri,* Kang Che-gyu, 1999 [see review on page 40. Ed.]). But the arrangement did allow Im to clarify for himself a specific project: in the "honest" films he would confront the manifold traumas of Korean history, and in doing so, he would create a specifically Korean art-film style.

Since World War II, national art-film styles have been conceived in the interplay between the deconstruction of the language of classic Hollywood cinema and some combination of two other frames of reference: first, the languages of cinemas constructed against capitalism—notably the socialist realisms adopted from the Soviet models in the People's Republic of China, Viet Nam, and North Korea, or the socialist modernisms developed especially in Latin America; second, the languages of pre-colonial domestic cultural practices adapted to the medium of film. The first alternative was categorically unavailable in South Korea during the Park Chung Hee regime of the 1960s and 70s, when Im was coming to maturity. During the consolidation of his stylistic strategies and of his fundamental conception of what a film could be, domestic repression, militant anti-Communism, and the demonization of North Korea anathematized any

Figure 1: *Sopyonje: p'ansori* singers as exemplary Korean artists

gestures toward socialist realism or the revolutionary Third Cinemas. By the *minjung* era, when loosening censorship allowed both directions to be explored in the short-film underground, Im was already 50 years old and successfully entrenched in his own project, which had perforce been organized in quite different terms. Of necessity, those terms had been developed out of the second alternative. With no access to a direct critique of capitalist culture per se, Im's address to Korean modernity was negotiated with respect to pre-colonial national culture.

For East Asian cinemas generally, traditional theater has been the most important of such cultural resources. The very first film made in China, for example, *Dingjun Mountain* (1905), was an adaptation of scenes from a Beijing opera. More recent Chinese films, otherwise as disparate and made in as radically different political conditions as *Two Stage Sisters, The Red Detachment of Women, Woman Demon Human, Peking Opera Blues, Stage Door, Good Men Good Women,* and *Farewell My Concubine,* attest to opera's ability to supply stylistic alternatives to American capitalist cinema. Though *Sopyonje* depicts a traditional operatic form and though pre-colonial dramatic and ritual forms were refurbished during the *minjung* cultural movement, theater has not been a fundamental resource for Korean cinema. Im's oeuvre as a whole is notable for his search through non-theatrical pre-modern cultural forms to ground the language of a modern Korean cinema, and in several of his best films, traditional cultural practices supply metaphors and models for his own aspirations.

Of Im's films about art, *Sopyonje* is the most comprehensive. The *p'ansori* singer Yu-bong and his adopted daughter, Song-hwa, are proposed as exemplary Korean artists attempting to sustain a specifically Korean culture against its debasement and neglect, and against the encroachment of foreign media (see figure 1). In *Mandala* (1981), the protagonist expresses his dissatisfaction with the indifference to worldly suffering of traditional Buddha images by carving his own primitive, agonized figure. And in *Festival* (*Ch'ukje,* 1996), Im's negotiation between Confucian tradition and contemporary culture is explicitly inscribed in the two roles of the protagonist, Chun-sŏp: on the one hand, he is a novelist who has made his career by writing about his family; on the other, he is a dutiful son who presides over the traditional rituals of his mother's funeral, which the film presents in elaborate ethnographic detail. Bringing together several narrators who recount the widowed

mother's heroic story of raising her seven children, these rituals restage the national question in the form of an allegory of the family, one that explores the terms by which its black sheep may be reintegrated. And the funeral ceremonies are interwoven with further dramatizations of the family in other mediums: Chun-sŏp's children's story about his mother's aging is presented in a highly artificial film style using digital technology; and the exploitation of his family in his own art is critically reviewed by a young journalist from a literary magazine.[6]

Such a use of multiple narrators subtends Im's distinctive formal innovations. Omniscient linear narration is replaced by extended, sometimes multiply nested subjective flashbacks to produce a structural sophistication matched only—among contemporary fiction filmmakers—by Hou Hsiao-hsien. In Im's best films, especially *Mandala, Sopyonje,* and *Festival,* the subjective narrators do not contradict one another (thus mobilizing some humanist ontological uncertainty) in the manner of, say *Rashomon,* the locus classicus of this technique. Rather, they break down the narrative into fragments that the filmmaker recombines to make thematic arguments, turning narrative into argument, *histoire* into *discourse*. But Im's use of the figure of the artist to investigate questions of national identity was first developed in a formally simpler film, one made at a low point in South Korean cinema, mid-way between the golden age of the 60s and the mid-80s renaissance. In *The Genealogy* (*Chokpp'o,* 1978)—the work in which he himself believed he first successfully "reflected a personal style"[7]—Im turned to ceramics, one of Korea's greatest cultural mediums, to mold the terms of a post-colonial cinema.

The Genealogy is set in the late 1930s, during the most oppressive phase of the Japanese occupation, when attempts to extirpate cultural difference included forcing all Koreans to take Japanese names. Believing in the sanctity of his family line, Sŏl Chin-yŏng, a Confucian clan patriarch, refuses to dishonor his ancestors by denying his Korean name. The negotiations between Sŏl Chin-yŏng and the colonial administration are carried out by a young Japanese, Dani, who is also a gifted artist. Recognizing the accomplishment of Dani's classical-style paintings, Sŏl welcomes him into his home more as a son than as an invader, and a romance develops between Dani and one of Sŏl's daughters, Ok-sun. Dani also experiments in modern idioms: he makes a pencil sketch of Ok-sun, and she accompanies him as he tries to paint the Korean countryside in oils (see figure 2). Meanwhile, Sŏl attempts to solve his predicament by a linguistic sleight; he simply takes the name that is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters that form his Korean name. But the Japanese see through his strategy. Increasing the stakes, they ruin his other daughter's forthcoming marriage by torturing his prospective son-in-law; then they draft Ok-sun into the Japanese army support unit, and Dani only narrowly manages to save her from becoming a comfort woman.

Sŏl's realization that he must choose between compromising his lineage and committing suicide comes to a crisis when his grandchildren demand Japanese names. After hearing their request, he turns to his collection of ceramics, and the film cuts to a non-diegetic interlude in which the camera scrutinizes a series of exquisite vases, while in a voiceover Sŏl quotes a Japanese theorist of Korean aesthetics, Yanaki Muneyoshi:

> Whoever reads the history of Chosŏn cannot but feel gloomy at its dark, miserable, and sometimes frightful history. This is the reason why they discuss the quality of solitude in aesthetics, and the aesthetic quality of solitude. That is, its suppressed destiny sought consolation in unspeakable loneliness and longing. The aesthetic of Chosŏn is . . . delicately imbued with the people's indescribable rancor, sorrow, or longing. Where else in the world could you find such beauty with so much sorrow? . . . Chosŏn is a country that might be weak outside, but is strong inside in its art.

"So Yanaki Muneyoshi has written," Sŏl concludes, "but I wonder what he would think about the suffering

Figure 2: *The Genealogy*: Dani with Ok-sun, painting the landscape

of Chosŏn that even forces people to change their names?" And as the camera passes over the elaborately wrought ceramic tiles of a Korean roof, the diegesis is restored, and we see Sŏl walking to his final confrontation with the Japanese and his suicide. The film concludes with Dani and Ok-sun together watching his funeral procession move through the countryside.

As well as experimenting with non-linear narrative forms (for example, after Dani learns of Sŏl's death, there follows a series of subjective interludes in which he imagines himself attacking his superiors in the occupying forces), *The Genealogy* assembles the terms of Im's mature project. Traditional Korean ceramics supply a referential aesthetic model; they embody an essential form of Korean culture, their rounded, hollowed forms making them readily appropriate for female-gendered conceptualizations of the nation, and in them is inscribed the trauma of Korean history. The central concept expressing this trauma is *han*.[8]

Taken by Koreans to be the essential national experience, *han* is constituted from sentiments of loss and rage at the severance of wholeness and continuity between self and history. The accumulated emotions of sufferers (and—inevitably in a strict Confucian patriarchy—especially of women), *han* may be projected onto any political ordeal, but in this century it has been primarily experienced as the response to devastating colonization and political division. The *han* sedimented in Sŏl's ceramics thus refers to the present, but the artworks themselves do not hold practical answers to present political problems. Any art that aspires to address Korea's modern traumas has to be rooted in tradition like ceramics, but also adapted to modern, colonial mediums like film. In *The Genealogy,* such an art is suggested in Dani's turn away from classical ink painting to experiments in Western art forms; his oil painting of the countryside and his pencil drawing of Ok-sun exemplify the confrontation with modern mediums that can allow the modern story to be told. But Dani's artworks also announce what in his subsequent films Im will mobilize as the two privileged symbols on which the historical trauma of the nation is re-enacted: the body of the Korean landscape, especially its spectacular mountains, and the bodies of Korean women, especially those of the working class.

Both tropes are constructed from the position of patriarchal specularity, but beyond that, the relationships between them are multiple, and reconstructed within the narrative possibilities of each film. Generally they oscillate between parallel and complementary functions. On the one hand, beautiful images of

Figure 3: *Women on Tano Day*, by Sin Yun-bok (1758–?)

women and of landscapes signify a pre-colonial Korea. As such, they are mutually equivalent and interchangeable with each other; in films about the modern period they both typically appear in violated or degraded forms, with the metaphoric equivalent of the desecrated woman's body being the antithesis of the natural landscape—that is, the metropolis, Seoul. On the other hand, the two tropes can also displace each other, with the natural landscape used to represent the nation in its pristine pre-colonial state and the woman's ravaged body its recent historical fate. Ubiquitous in Im's work, these two motifs probably reflect his own unconscious, unresolved Oedipal drives, and the personal resonances they carry must be rich and complex. But both are also deeply traditional.

Landscape is the core of pre-colonial Korean painting, and the parallel literary traditions are informed by the rigid sexual codes of Confucian patriarchy. One of the master-myths of Korean culture is the all but sadomasochistic *Story of Ch'unhyang* (*Ch'unhyang'ga*), a fable about the daughter of a *kisaeng* (courtesan), a member of the lowest class (*ch'ŏnmin*) in Chosŏn society, who is cruelly tortured during the prolonged absence of her *yangban* (aristocrat) husband. The story was the subject of the first Korean talkie in 1935 and it has been filmed a dozen times since then, with spectacular success by Lee Kyu-hwan in 1955, and most recently by Im himself.[9] One of the most famous and often-reproduced of Korean paintings, *Women on Tano Day*, by Sin Yun-bok (1758-?), (see figure 3), itself an innovation against classical Chinese painting, combines the motifs of both the female body and the landscape, while its depiction of furtive male spectators also foregrounds the voyeuristic transactions of patriarchal

specularity.[10] Given this genealogy, any contemporary use of the two motifs must be deeply ideological, inhabited by all the cultural structures of pre-colonial feudalism as well as by their adaptation to the requirements of colonial and neo-colonial capitalist development. However traditional it might be, the idealization of the Korean landscape is for the domestic spectator overdetermined by the industrialization and urbanization that (like the inception of industrialization and modern landscape art in England at the end of the eighteenth century) cause the rural world to appear as the location not of agrarian labor or deprivation, but of recreation and spiritual renewal. For the foreign spectator, an equivalent attraction is fuelled by the imbrication of the cultural tourism of cinema with the global politics of the tourist industry, a prostitution of its spectacular natural landscape in which South Korea has conspicuously engaged in its attempt to attract international attention.

Korean feminism and film theory have presented fully developed analyses of the relations between both Confucian patriarchal and contemporary capitalist exploitation of women and their roles in the post-colonial literature and South Korean film industry.[11] The central argument has been that the metaphoric use of women to represent the violation of the nation by Japanese and U.S. aggressors is never merely metaphoric; it also renews the ideological conditions for the ongoing exploitation of women. The feminist argument is clearly applicable to Im's brutalized heroines: Ok-sun in *Mandala,* Se-yŏng in *Ticket* (*Tik'et,* 1986), Ok-nyŏ in *Surrogate Mother* (*Ss'ibaji*,1986), Adada in *Adada* (1988), Song-hwa in *Sopyonje,* Yong-sun in *Festival,* and Chunhyang in *Chunhyang*. In these films, Im represents the historical exploitation of working-class women through graphic images of sexual victimization that also provide quasi-pornographic sadistic pleasure for the spectator. *Adada* is especially problematic in its use of both motifs: the scenes of Adada's sexual intercourse with her *yangban* husband before he is corrupted by capital and with her peasant lover before his greed causes her death are all powerfully erotic, turning her rape into titillating spectacle. And the sympathetic reflection of her tragedy in images of the countryside completes the aestheticization of the environment; whether these images represent the fecundity of her youthful purity in spring and harvest time or, in winter, the devastation to which she is victim, the scenes are always ravishing.

However the multiple social and cultural pressures that produce it are understood, the insistent narrative positioning of both women and nature as objects of a masculinized national subjectivity cannot be disregarded, nor simply ascribed to a self-conscious play with the expectations of a reifying, self-orientalizing gaze. And neither Im's own reiterated explanation of the historical grounding of his use of the trope of the victimized woman nor its ubiquitousness in other cinemas can mitigate its role in reproducing the ideological conditions that sustain the exploitation of proletarian women—in Korea and everywhere else. A progressive cinema will find its own accommodation between (to use Mao's terms) the "raising of standards" and "popularization"; but, short of re-engaging the utopian gesture of early feminism and jettisoning cinema as a whole with nothing "more than sentimental regret,"[12] any cinema that aspires to a wide social influence will have to work within the terms that constitute national subjectivity.

But in fact, while the two motifs consistently form the basis for Im's symbolic vocabulary, their positions in the thematic structure of his narratives are not mechanically fixed. Rather, a range of local variations in different films opens out to varying degrees of self-consciousness and critique of the main combinatory process. Such indeed is the case in *The Genealogy,* where the invasion is enacted on the patriarchal body and Ok-sun is saved by a Japanese from being raped by the Japanese. But even where the nation is gendered as female, the oppression of women is commonly linked not simply to the oppression of Korea by invaders, but specifically to the oppression of the working class. This use of women to symbolize the working class is made possible either by virtue of the class-location of the women themselves (Ok-nyŏ in *Surrogate Mother* or Yong-sun in *Festival*) or by allegorical identification, as in the case of Adada, whose expulsion from the *yangban* household allows her intradiegetic affiliation with the landless peasantry and her extradiegetic association with the labor movements of the winter of 1987-88. Im's metaphoric use of gender difference allowed him to imply class issues at times when censorship prohibited any explicit address to labor unrest.

It is noteworthy that in none of these cases of the sexual brutalization of women is the male a foreign invader; he is always Korean—a "bad" Korean to be sure, who acts as the agent of an internal structural social inequality. Furthermore, in Im's two remarkable films starring actress Kim Chi-mi, the class/gender parallels are extremely complicated. In *Gilsottum* (*Kilsott'ŭm,* 1985), Kim plays an exemplary Im-heroine/victim who has suffered all Korea's trials in the last half-century, but when she finds the son she lost during the civil war, she rejects him because his lumpen behavior and at-

titudes manifest a class difference she now finds unacceptable. In *Ticket,* Kim's character is a divorced woman who survives by managing a brothel. As a madam, she collaborates with capitalist patriarchy in extracting surplus value from the young women who work for her, but the contradictions between her oppression of them and the oppression she as a woman herself experiences—between her roles as the agent and as the victim of exploitation—finally drive her insane.

Im's two films about the modern existence of one of the most ancient components of Korean culture, Sŏn Buddhism, whose philosophic structures would appear categorically to inhibit the identification of the nation's geographical body and the bodies of its women, further illustrate the flexibility and nuance with which he has mobilized these motifs. One was made before and the other after the *minjung* movement that transformed the possibilities of Korean political and cultural expression.

Buddhism: Eroticism and Landscape in *Mandala* and *Come, Come, Come Upward* (*Aje'aje para'aje,* 1989)[13]

Several schools of Mahayana Buddhism were transmitted from China to Three Kingdoms Korea around the end of the fourth century, and with the Silla unification in 668, the religion became closely associated with the autocratic monarchy. By the end of the seventh century, Sŏn, the Korean form of the Ch'an schools that emphasized individual attainment of enlightenment through meditation rather than through the progressive accumulation of merit by sutra study, ritual acts, or good works, was established as the Nine Mountain Schools (Kusan Sŏnmun).[14] Solidifying its relation with state power, Sŏn had by the ninth century become the dominant force in Korean Buddhism, and hence the dominant cultural force in Korea. Despite attempts to syncretize the schools by Ŭich'ŏn and by Chinul in the eleventh and twelfth centuries respectively, tensions between Sŏn and other schools of Buddhism, especially the Kyo schools that emphasized doctrinal study, were continuous, though Sŏn was generally dominant. During the Chosŏn dynasty, Buddhism was persecuted by the Neo-Confucian bureaucracy: monastic lands were confiscated and most temples, including all those in metropolitan areas, were closed. Not until the Japanese occupation did Buddhism begin to reconstruct its former prominence; in 1935, Sŏn and Kyo were merged into a single order, called Chogye, and since then both forms have been practiced side by side in all Korean temples. The restoration process has continued in the South since the liberation and partition, with the Buddhist hierarchy also renewing its relations with state power.[15]

In Sŏn thought, the natural world and sexuality have been antithetical throughout this history. Since the time of Nine Mountain Schools, the monasteries have always been built in remote mountain areas, and Sŏn has been so fundamentally associated with the mountains that the Korean vernacular for "to become a monk" is *ipsan,* "to enter the mountains." Celibacy is similarly fundamental. Following the *Vinaya Pitaka,* the foundational disciplinary text of Buddhism, the third of the ten precepts that the novice monk commits to during the ordination ceremony is the promise not to engage in sexual intercourse, and doing so is one of four *parajikas,* offenses that can incur expulsions from the order.[16] In Sŏn thought, then, Im's two dominant tropes—the landscape and erotic relations—are both prominent, but as the mutually exclusive terms of a binary: the monastic celibacy of the mountains is the antithesis of sexuality and the city. Im's two Buddhist-themed films force the disjunction between the semiotic structure of Sŏn and that of his own characteristic themes into a productive interaction; rather than mechanically reproducing either system, they construct their narratives across the tensions between them.[17]

Both *Mandala* and *Come, Come, Come Upward* explore the same question: What is socially at stake in the choice between a pure ascetic life in the mountains and a life of active participation in the world's affairs. The films are structurally parallel, each narratively focused on a pair of Sŏn monks in mountain temples: in both, one monk makes a commitment to meditational retreat but the other leaves to live in the world; and in both, the latter option is chosen as a result of expulsion from the monastery for infraction of the prohibition against sexual relations. But in the former film, the monks are both male, and in the latter, both female. The dynamics of sexuality, including the power and scopic relations constructed within it, appear then in antithetical, reversed formulations. *Mandala* exhibits a substantial reconfiguration of Im's usual gender positionings, but in *Come, Come, Come Upward,* where the protagonists are women, they are spectacularly revised. Though the primacy of suffering in Buddhist ontology universalizes *han* in these films, presenting loss as intrinsic to the human situation rather than exclusively a condition of Korean history, nevertheless Buddhism's responsiveness—or lack of it—to the trauma

Figure 4: *Mandala*: Pŏb-un and Chi-san meet on the road

of national social conditions is Im's real concern in both. But since one was made at the beginning of the 1980s and the other at the end, the question is broached from opposite points of the radical transformation of Korean society.

Mandala, an adaptation of a best-selling novel,[18] concerns a young monk, Pŏb-un, who meets an older monk, Chi-san, while both are on the road during the free period between winter and summer meditation (see figure 4). Chi-san, an obstreperous drunk, tells the story of how he was seduced, not unwillingly to be sure, by Ok-sun, a teenage girl vacationing near his temple. Soon after, her friend was raped and Chi-san was accused; though he was acquitted after a semen test, the scandal of his relations with Ok-sun caused him to be expelled from the temple. Still wearing his robes, he left with Ok-sun for a period of indulgence in Seoul's bars and discos. But, as Chi-san tells Pŏb-un, dealing with sexual desire by confronting it rather than evading it did not bring enduring pleasure; sex temporarily reconciled subject and object, or self and the world, but in the end "stacking up two bodies was a futile attempt indeed." After a week, Chi-san arrived "at a peak of emptiness" and, realizing that his vocation was still that of a monk, he left Ok-sun and became an itinerant. Later, Pŏb-un encounters Chi-san again and travels with him, eventually back to the red light district in Seoul where, now several years later, Ok-sun is a prostitute. Pŏb-un returns to meditation in his home temple, where he meets Su-gwan, a monk who tries to gain enlightenment by burning off his fingers. Then he meets Chi-san yet again, travels with him to the mountains in the winter, and accompanies him when he is called on to consecrate a small temple. But, after a night of drunkenness, Chi-san freezes to death in the snow. Pŏb-un builds him a pyre, and then returns to Seoul, where he briefly meets his own mother, who had abandoned him as a child. Bidding her farewell, he sets out on the road again.

Chi-san is one of the artist figures who model Im's own project. On one occasion when Pŏb-un's discipline and abstinence seem ineffective, he comes across Chi-san carving a Buddha that, unlike traditional images, is crude and grotesque, tortured rather than

serene. As the visuals cut to non-diegetic images of traditional smiling Buddhas, Chi-san argues that since Gautama was a human, not a god, he could not have kept smiling when the poor and the weak were "suffering under oppression by the privileged," and so his image should "bear expressions of agony, grief, sorrow, and rage." Against Sŏn's lack of social engagement and the dispassion of conventional Buddhist images, Chi-san's art summarizes the compassion of his socially engaged practice and his concern with the oppression of the lowly by the privileged. These are the issues that Im wants his own art to address; Chi-san's Buddha image and the *han* it expresses figure a socially responsible cinema that can narrate the *han* of Korean history and critique contemporary Korean society while still retaining a dialectical continuity with traditional cultural forms. Conversely, Im's endorsement of Chi-san's humanist revision of Sŏn that brings Buddhism closer to social problems also obliges him to reconfigure the deep structures of his own iconography.

The film's most crucial doctrinal issues revolve around Chi-san's sexual indulgence. Initially, his doubts and his drunken licentiousness mark him, as he admits, as a degenerate apostate, a *tt'aengch'o,* "an unworthy monk, a disgrace to others." His subsequent rehabilitation demands that these sexual transgressions be not merely absolved, but proven to constitute a practice superior to monastic renunciation. The narrative argues such a critique of Sŏn orthodoxy first by demonstrating the limitations of asceticism, and second by revealing a soteriological implication in Chi-san's sexuality. The narrative elements that make these points are both entirely absent from the novel, and Im's fabrication of them indicates their importance to his film's argument. The first is introduced via Su-gwan, a character not even present in the novel; he impugns his head monk's insight and, although he has already burned off two of his fingers, he burns off a third in an act of symbolic castration that Im photographs in excruciating detail.[19] But later, when Su-gwan meets Pŏb-un on the road, he tells him that though his critique of the master still stands, he has realized the futility of self-mortification and indeed of meditation itself. From now on, Su-gwan affirms, he will be guided by the Buddhist precept that there is no distinction between self and others and his route to salvation will be through service to others; he dedicates himself to Kwanseŭm (Avalokitesvara), the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Questioned further by Pŏb-un, he describes how he has been inspired by a heroic monk who, during a plague on Chuk-to, a remote island off the south coast, devoted himself to the sick without regard for his own safety. The monk's name, he declares, was Chi-san.

The film immediately cuts to Chi-san in meditation; a shot of a flock of birds rising in the air symbolically indicates his enlightenment and prefigures Pŏb-un's,[20] and the narrative returns to the latter as he comes to meet Chi-san for the final movement of the film. From this point on, Chi-san's story unfolds exclusively in the mountains, and here he is finally recognized as a master. Called on to paint the eyes in a statue of the Buddha in a mountain temple, he delivers his final sermon emphasizing not doctrinal correctness, but the awakening of the heart to Buddha. And here he achieves his fiery apotheosis. In these scenes, Im gives full rein to the extravagantly beautiful snow-covered landscapes of Mount Sŏrak, which now read as evidence of Chi-san's enlightenment.[21]

Overall, then, the narrative claims that Chi-san's sexual promiscuity reflected his correct recognition of the sterility of meditational isolation and so was intrinsic to his enlightenment and ministry. But the logic that links the expansion and reformulation of his capacity for love is constructed across the very weak bridge of his service to the plague victims of Chuk-to—an instance of social responsibility that is not present in the novel, not represented in the film except in Su-gwan's account, and so not developed as a component within Chi-san's characterization. This benevolent service is an arbitrary and dramatically unconvincing addition, adduced ex machina to link Chi-san's "love" for Ok-sun with his "love" for humanity, just as the cycles of sexual desire and emptiness he experiences with her teach him the meaning of the parallel cycles of death and rebirth. The strain in the narrative structure reflects the tension between the novel's vision of Buddhism and the demands of Im's own thematic concerns and iconographic system.

The final images of Chi-san in the mountains also resolve the discursive use of landscape in the narrative. Where the sexuality/enlightenment antinomy is resolved by authorial fiat, the parallel mountain/city binary of the Sŏn tradition is reconfigured through the introduction of a third spatiality: the intramontane plains of everyday village life and human labor. The importance of this spatiality is indicated at the beginning of the film, where, after the opening scenes of meditation in the mountain temple, a very long stationary shot shows a desolate and empty winter agricultural landscape in which the only activity is a bus moving down a primitive road at the edge of the frame. This is clearly one of the shots that Im has spoken of as his ideal, that is, completely static shots that articulate

the "Korean traditional concept known as 'Chŏng chung tong' . . . meaning . . . motion (or action) within stillness"—an ideal with obvious correlatives in Buddhism.[22] But unlike the long takes at the beginning of *Gilsottum* and especially the celebrated long take in *Sopyonje*, which are occupied by human actors and given elaborate thematic depth by the other art forms they each contain (respectively, the plaintive quality of the North-South reunions in the television program and the *p'ansori* recitation), here the only movement in the frame is the bus that will bring Chi-san and Pŏb-un together. In this liminal space between Seoul and the mountains, Chi-san wanders, performs his ministry, and finds the way to his salvation. Its thematic role is made explicit when, at the peak of his agony, Chi-san asks where he can go. Pŏb-un tells him to go to the mountains, that is, back to the conventional practice of Buddhism. But Chi-san—whose name means "one who knows mountains"—replies that this is not possible for him, setting into play the narrative's task in these everyday places, which is to equip him for precisely his movement across Im's key icons, to return him to his true self by transforming him into "one who knows mountains" from, so to speak, "one who knows women."

Chi-san's odyssey in this liminal space occupies the bulk of the film, sustaining the implication that the work of the true Buddhist is done in the midst of everyday life. The theme is dramatized in Chi-san's own narrative, and also through his effect on other characters: on Su-gwan, on Ok-sun (who, when she has become a prostitute, devotedly receives him as a holy man), and especially on Pŏb-un. Since Pŏb-un's peregrinations generally follow Chi-san's, the landscape motif is articulated in parallel terms; the world in which Pŏb-un must find his own way between sexuality and asceticism is that of everyday life, between Seoul and the mountains. But certain aspects of the articulation of the two motifs are in Pŏb-un's case even more complex.

Like Chi-san, Pŏb-un is tormented by erotic desires that threaten his practice. He yearns for his college girlfriend, Yŏng-ju, whom he left to become a monk, and the agony of his desire for her makes him a sympathetic interlocutor for Chi-san. But fuelling that situation is an unresolved Oedipal desire that recalls *Home Is Where the Heart Is*. In fragmentary flashbacks we learn that when Pŏb-un was a child, his mother abandoned him to go to Seoul, driven by her own sexual desires after the death of her husband. Traumatized by the loss of his mother, Pŏb-un continues to have an inordinate amount of affect around her and, after he is enlightened by Chi-san, it is she (not Yŏng-ju, who had appeared to reclaim their love) whom he visits before he takes his final leave of human relationships. In the film's concluding scenes, Pŏb-un journeys to Seoul to meet his mother, and his parting from her supplies the film's most powerful visualization of liberation from earthly attachments.

But though Pŏb-un does not imitate Chi-san's exploration of sexuality, his torment is still illustrated via Im's dominant tropes. During his initiation, for example, when the master reads the precept against sexual intercourse, Im inserts, entirely without diegetic justification, a single shot of a fruit tree in full bloom. Though non-diegetic metaphors are not impossible within the terms of Im's realism, the caprice here suggests that whatever reading we might adduce—that the blossom represents Pŏb-un's realization that religious interdictions fall on life's fairest flowers, perhaps—is as much a function of Im's subjectivity as of Pŏb-un's. Pŏb-un does not live the tension between the two tropes as fully as Chi-san does, so it surfaces only in fragments like this, cinematic versions of slips of the tongue that voice repressed desire. But in one instance the expression is extraordinary.

During the brothel scene, after Chi-san retires with Ok-sun, Pŏb-un goes to sleep in an empty room. While he is sleeping, a woman who is known to the other prostitutes for liking sex with monks enters the room and fellates him—a reversal of the violation of women so common in Im's films. Though it does not entail the violent physical and psychic penetration of a real rape, when he awakens in the middle of it, Pŏb-un experiences the fellation as a horrifying defilement. But before he wakes, he dreams: a rapid alternating montage of his face and the back of the prostitute's naked body builds up, cut through by a series of traveling shots across a lush green forest. These are further intercut with a scene that has *no* narrative justification or explanation whatsoever, a scene in which Pŏb-un rapes his old girlfriend, Yŏng-ju (the sensationalist poster for the film juxtaposes the two violations [see figure 5]). He tears at her clothes, she resists, and as the act is consummated, Im cuts to a shot of her purse lying in the grass. In this nightmare, the film's unconscious generates a condensed figure for Im's fundamental thematics, reasserting them even at the moment of their most drastic reversal.

Where the novel emphasizes the corruption of the orthodox Buddhist community, Im's rewriting of it as a critique of Sŏn meditative asceticism allows him to reaffirm the humanism of his historically self-conscious art cinema as a whole, and also to fore-

Figure 5: Poster for *Mandala*: the prostitute fellates Pŏb-un while he dreams of raping his girlfriend

ground the oppression of working-class women and the redemptive power of their sexuality. Like Im's reworking of Buddhist symbolic topography, both themes are incommensurate with Sŏn doctrine. But though the tensions between Sŏn and the structuring combinatory of Im's oeuvre appear as ruptures in the thematic architecture of *Mandala,* they also generate the film's emotive power. By incorporating sexuality and spectacular landscape photography in a complex narrative so profoundly fixed in an integral component of the national culture, Im achieves a film with immense resonances for both domestic-popular and international-art-film audiences. Its affective force does not come from its critique of Buddhism, but from its presentation of Buddhism as a national cultural treasure, the epitome of humanist social responsibility yet also intrinsically exotic and indeed erotic—in a word, "orientalized."[23] *Mandala*'s authority rests on its sublimity, a sublimity in which soaring Buddhist chants hallow sublime Buddhist temple architecture, sublime Buddhist ritual, and even—as in the case of Su-gwan's finger-burning and perhaps the "rape" of Pŏb-un—sublime Buddhist anguish.[24]

During the 1980s, the decade after *Mandala,* political liberalization and increased attention to the exploitation of the working class within the Korean economic miracle accompanied a relaxation of censorship laws that allowed filmmakers to address these issues more directly, and also allowed them a new, often exploitative graphicness in the representation of sexuality. In this context, Im made detailed studies of working-class exploitation in *Gilsottum, Ticket, Surrogate Mother,* and *Adada,* all focusing on victimized women. In 1989, with *Come, Come, Come Upward,* he returned to a Buddhist-themed narrative, structurally parallel to *Mandala* but with the radical difference that its main protagonists were both women. As they confront the question of how we should live properly in this world of suffering, the film's narrative task is to generate a model of unselfish Buddhist practice, compatible with Im's overall humanism and his rejection of ideology, that contributes to "enlightenment" as a social condition: a free, peaceful, and non-exploitative commonality.

Mandala presents Chi-san as having achieved a state of "thoughtless" social activity, directed by compassion but still in accord with reality. But the film's weakness is that the manifestation of his bodhisattva activity in his service to the plague victims of Chukto was disarticulated from its narrative links with eroticism; the result was a thematic rupture, for the implied association between sexuality and social service was not dramatized or otherwise persuasively presented. While *Come, Come, Come, Upward* minimizes *Mandala*'s orientalizing spectacularization of Buddhist ritual and architecture (it also lacks Chŏng Il-sŏng's ravishing landscape photography), it more fully elaborates the semiotic resources of Im's combinatory process, and vividly demonstrates in both narrative and visual terms the relationship between erotic love and social compassion that is so flimsy in *Mandala*. It also allows Im to take advantage of the relaxed censorship situation, and—since the main protagonists are women—female sexuality becomes to an unprecedented degree proactive. Women appear as possessed of sexuality *and* as the agents of historical transformation, rather than as merely the passive objects of male violation and historical trauma. The foregrounding of female sexuality in *Come, Come, Come, Upward* allows Im to critique Sŏn more forcefully, and to affirm Mahayana Buddhism's compassionate social activity and his own humanism. But now his "non-ideological" humanism appears in contradistinction to

Figure 6: *Come, Come, Come Upward*: Sun-nyŏ is ordained

the more explicitly "ideological" politics of *minjung* and to the more radical New Wave filmmakers who had come to maturity during the decade.

Come, Come, Come, Upward is primarily the story of Sun-nyŏ, a young nun who has entered a temple as a novitiate. Despite her fervent desire for a life of meditation, she is several times refused ordination, and the head nun, Ŭn-sŏn, mysteriously tells her that the study she needs is not to be found in the monastery, and that rather than joining the *sangha,* she should accept herself and the mission that she already knows is hers. The scenes of Sun-nyŏ's early days at the temple are punctuated by a series of extended flashbacks to her life as a schoolgirl that associate her with a strong sexual energy and also with some of the most traumatic events in Korean history; they range from the defeat of the last king of Paekche by Silla and Chinese forces, through the Tonghak rebellion, to Korea's neo-colonial dependency on the United States represented by the Kwangju massacre and Korean participation in the invasion of Viet Nam.[25] These flashbacks, all of which involve some combination of sexual and national politics, occupy virtually the first half of the film. Though justified in terms of Sun-nyŏ's characterization, they do not primarily function to reveal her psychological motivation or establish the importance of her subjectivity; in fact, as the narrative unfolds, these latter are revealed as irrelevant, entirely subordinated to her karma. The flashbacks in fact operate analytically and, organized by the compositional strategies Im had perfected over the previous decade, they generate a thematic crisis. By the mid-point of the film, Sun-nyŏ has become invested with all the *han* of Korean history and contemporary politics, and the film has produced Im's primary theoretical problem: How can traditional culture be used to confront the *han* of present-day Korea and what part can Buddhism play in that confrontation? The second half of the film answers this question by again contrasting orthodox Sŏn practice (represented by another young nun, Chin-sŏng) with the unconventional, extra-monastic benevolent practice into which Sun-nyŏ is precipitated. So where the first half of the film is an alternating montage of Sun-nyŏ's monastic life and the previous experiences that invest her with

Korea's *han,* the second half is an alternating montage of Chin-sŏng's and Sun-nyŏ's contrary practices of Buddhism.

Sun-nyŏ is eventually accepted into the order (see figure 6), but no sooner has she taken her vows than the full weight of her karma crashes down on her. A petty criminal whose life she had inadvertently saved when he attempted suicide becomes obsessed with her, and his attentions are so scandalous that, despite all her appeals, Sun-nyŏ is expelled from the temple. But before she leaves, Ŭn-sŏn implies that one day she might be allowed to return and gives her a *hwadu* (koan) that restates the primary dialectics of Sŏn in terms of her own situation: "Between your spirit that stays here and your body rambling around in the world, which one is real?" Sun-nyŏ's experience of her body rambling in the real world leads her to a life of benevolent self-sacrifice among the working class that includes sexual relations with men. Initially she gives herself to the man who caused her to be expelled, and though he rapes her, she reforms him, and they both become very happy, especially when she becomes pregnant; but he is killed in a mining accident and Sun-nyŏ miscarries. She continues her practice, becoming a nurse, and working heroically through an epidemic, an event that (unlike its equivalent with Chi-san on Chuk-to in *Mandala*) is extensively represented and integrated into the narrative. During the epidemic, Sun-nyŏ becomes involved with an ambulance driver named Song, caring for him and his baby son. All the while, her bodhisattva practice of spontaneous benevolence in the real world is counterpointed against the career of Chin-sŏng, who manifests none of Sun-nyŏ's social commitment. Even when she encounters the 1987 democratization riots during a period of study in Seoul, she dismisses the activist student who reproaches her unconcern with the city-workers' and farmers' struggles. But Chin-sŏng's meditational practice fails to develop, and she too sets out to wander.

The two practices reach their crisis in two paired scenes that conclude the film. In the first, a surrealistic sequence parallel to Pŏb-un's nightmare but also recalling Su-gwan, Chin-sŏng's quest has led her to a remote cave. While she is meditating there, she is assaulted by a monk who has castrated himself in a vain attempt to transcend his own sexual desire. He seizes her and undoes his clothes as if he would rape her (see figure 7), but all he can do is force her to look at his

Figure 7: *Come, Come, Come Upward*: the attempted rape of Chin-sŏng

wound. The scene is extraordinary, without parallel in any cinema I know. Beginning as if it will again act out the violation of a woman by a man, it categorically inverts patriarchal power and scopic relations. It is the man, not the woman, who is positioned as the object of the gaze, and when the woman looks, what she sees is the mark of his castration, his lack of a phallus, which figures the impotence of meditational asceticism and self-mortification. The film then returns to Sun-nyŏ's ministry; she continues her heroic work and the epidemic is eventually contained. After the doctors and nurses have a party to celebrate their success, she and Song go home together, and in a very graphic scene, she passionately makes love to him. But her sexuality is so powerful that he dies during his orgasm. Again the film cuts, this time back to the mountain temple; Chin-sŏng has broken the impasse in her practice, but Ŭn-sŏn is on her deathbed. Sun-nyŏ hurries to Ŭn-sŏn, who welcomes her and indicates that she—Sun-nyŏ, not Chin-sŏng—has fulfilled her mission. While watching Ŭn-sŏn's cremation, Sun-nyŏ finally realizes the answer to her koan. Recognizing the Buddha-nature that was, as Ŭn-sŏn had implied, already hers all along, she collects fragments of the abbess's bones, planning to build a thousand pagodas, each with a bone at its heart. The film ends with Sun-nyŏ, now fully comprehending the relation between spiritual and material reality, setting out again to save the masses from their struggle in illusion.

Together, Sun-nyŏ's and Chin-sŏng's diametrically opposite practices catalogue the Im combinatory process as it is articulated through contemporary Buddhism and figured in extreme forms of sexuality. The tension between the mountains and the metropolis is again resolved by centering the narrative in small provincial towns, but this time more richly and completely than in *Mandala*. The resultant spatiality appears as the location of industry, ordinary social life, human relations, and of course, epidemic illness; it mediates between mountain isolation and the polemically political, Marxist-influenced politics of Seoul, where by this time the small-film movement's confrontation with Korean social injustice was more radical, filmicly and politically, than Im ever sought to be. Oscillating between the extremes of Seoul and the mountain cave, Chin-sŏng's itinerary links these spaces, denigrating both radical politics and asceticism as opposite sides of the same coin. Sun-nyŏ achieves enlightenment in the liminal geographies between them; her sexual munificence is metonymic for her general social ministry, and it is the source of her own spiritual development. This allows the film to assert a redemptive humanism founded in female sexuality and defined in contradistinction to both meditational asceticism in the mountains and the ideological models of violent social change taking place in the *minjung*-dominated metropolis. Sun-nyŏ's sexual self-sacrifice is, of course, on one level a sado-masochistic Confucian male fantasy, and the scene where the intensity of her sexuality kills Song echoes with the motifs of soft-core pornography and exploitation genre films. But Sun-nyŏ's love is also the benevolence of an enlightened bodhisattva, and we may surmise that if the ecstasy with which she delivers Song from this incarnation does not take him to Nirvana, then nothing will.[26] Concluding her work in the epidemic, her act is the fully expressive climax of her overall spiritual itinerary, and the peripety of a narrative in which Im negotiates the conventions of both popular melodrama and Korea's richest pre-colonial heritage to argue a compelling cultural allegory: rather than merely representing the ravished, colonized nation, a working-class woman becomes both symbol and agent of its redemption.

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Notes

1. For research and other forms of assistance in the preparation of this essay, I am indebted to Jiwon Ahn, Kyung-Hyun Kim, and Dale Wright. All translations from the Korean are by Jiwon Ahn and Kyung-Hyun Kim. This essay is excerpted from David E. James and Kyung Hyun, eds., *Im Kwon-Taek: The Making of a Korean National Cinema* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, forthcoming).
2. On the *minjung* period, see Hagen Koo, "The State, Minjung, and the Working Class in South Korea," in *State and Society in South Korea,* ed. Hagen Koo (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 131-62, and *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence,* ed. Kenneth M. Wells (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995).
3. For an overview of the emergence of this generation of directors, see Isolde Standish, "Korean Cinema and the New Realism: Text and Context," in *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema,* ed. Wimal Dissanayake (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994); for a consideration of the authorial role of the director in this period, see Kyung-Hyun Kim, "The Emergence of Auteurism in Recent Korean Cinema," *Korean Culture,* 17, 3 (1996), 4-11.

4. In the late 1950s, when Im was serving his apprenticeship and the industry was producing about 100 features a year, there were 72 companies; in 1973, the motion picture law reduced the number of these companies from 71 to 16; see Lee Young-Il, "A Thumbnail Sketch of Korean Film History," in *Im Kwon-Taek: Filmemacher aus Korea/A Korean Filmmaker* (Munich: Munich Film Festival, 1990), 72.
5. Quoted in Gina-Yu Gustaveson, in "Im Kwon-Taek: Filmmaker and Humanist," in *Im Kwon-Taek: Filmemacher aus Korea,* 30. The film with which Im attempted to move away from commercial filmmaking was *The Deserted Widow* (*Chapch'o,* 1973). Another account of Im's personal crisis is recorded by Tadao Sato: "It was the fruit of an intense feeling of wanting to throw off the mask that I so fondly wore when entertaining my audiences. I wanted to escape from those blatant lies . . . the best way to bring out the truth, I thought, was to depict the life of my own mother"; see Sato's "Tradition and Transition: Im Kwon-Taek," *Cinemaya,* 12 (1991), 63.
6. In this list of artist-protagonists, surrogates for the director himself, one should also note the journalist in *Hidden Hero* (*Kippal omnun kisu,* 1979) and his writer's block. Foreshadowing Adada's muteness in *Adada* (1988), it represents Im's narration of the impossibility of telling the Korean story. A parallel complex of issues revolves around language, with the tensions among Chinese, Japanese, and Hangul representing the fragmentation of national identity, somewhat in the manner of Hou Hsiao-hsien's use of linguistic dispersal in his films about the colonial period in Taiwan. The name changes the Japanese impose on the patriarch in *The Genealogy* is an especially condensed instance; see the discussion below. Adada's imminent degradation is similarly prefigured by her husband's attempts to treat her muteness by teaching her to pronounce Japanese letters. Parallel issues recur with the prostitutes in *The Hidden Hero,* who learn English to work the occupying GIs.
7. Quoted in Klaus Eder, "Conversation with Im Kwon-Taek," in *Im Kwon-Taek: Filmemacher aus Korea,* 30.
8. On *han,* see Choi Kil-Sung, *Hankuk-in Ui Han* (*The Korean's Han,* Seoul: Yechonsa, 1991). Recently, Korean Americans have superimposed the fact of exile from the homeland on the inherited resonances of *han*; see, for example, Juli Kang, "Stories Behind the Han," *Koream Journal* 9, 3 (March 1998), 20. *Sopyonje* contains Im's fullest elaboration of the aesthetics of *han,* articulated in Yu-bong's teaching and dramatized in Song-hwa's performance.
9. Im's *Chunhyang* (2000) was chosen for the Official Competition Section at the Cannes Film Festival, the first time ever that a Korean film has been so honored. Selected for the New York Film Festival in 2000, it was later released commercially in the United States.
10. Sin, the first Korean artist to paint *kisaeng,* was eventually expelled from the Bureau of Painting because of his erotic themes. See Marjorie Williams, "Five Hundred Years of Korean Painting," *Orientations,* 12, 1 (January, 1981), 10-13.
11. For the "violence" of sexualized representations of the nation, see You-me Park, "Against Metaphor: Gender, Violence and Decolonization in Korean Nationalist Literature," in *In Pursuit of Contemporary East Asian Culture*, ed. Xiaobing Tang and Stephen Snyder (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 33-48; for the ideological function of the Korean "women's film" and for avant-garde feminist critiques of it, see Kim So-young, "Questions of Woman's Film," in *Post-Colonial Classics of Korean Cinema,* ed. Chung-moo Choi (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998); for the cultural reverberations of the double oppression of post-colonial Korean women, see Chungmoo Choi, "Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea," in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, ed. Elaine H. Kim and Chung-moo Choi (New York: Routledge, 1998), 9-30.
12. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, 3 (Autumn 1975), 18.
13. *Aje'aje para'aje* are the opening syllables of the Korean form of the Sanskrit mantra, *Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi svaha,* that concludes the *Heart Sutra.*
14. Deriving from the Chinese *Ch'an,* Sŏn is the meditational form of Buddhism known as *Zen* in Japanese. For English-language accounts of Korean Buddhism, see especially Robert E. Buswell, "Buddhism in Korea," in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion,* volume 2, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 421-26; *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991); and *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991). See also *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha: The Teaching of Zen Master Seung Sahn*, ed. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Grove Press, 1976); *Lives of Eminent Korean Monks*, ed. Peter Lee (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); Keel Hee-Sung, *Chinul: The Founder of the Korean Son Tradition* (Seoul: Po Chin Chai, 1984); Mu Soeng, Sunim, *Thousand Peaks: Korean Zen—Tradition and Teachers* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1987); and *A Buddha from Korea: The Zen Teachings of T'Aego,* ed. J.C. Cleary (Boston, MA: Shambala, 1988).
15. Buddhism was actively supported by both the Syng-man Rhee and Park Chung Hee administrations; after Roo Tae-woo's government put him on trial for the Kwangju massacre, Chun Doo-hwan took refuge in a Buddhist temple. Until the mid-1970s, neither the Buddhist *sangha* nor the Christian church were actively involved in the social and political movements of the time, and a "Minjung Buddhism" did not emerge until several years after *Mandala.*
16. In only one period was this celibacy qualified. During the occupation, following the Japanese custom, monks were permitted to marry. Believing that Buddhism had to secularize if it was to regain its contact with the lay population, master Han Yong-Un (1878-1944) vigorously proposed this, circumventing the Vinaya prohibition by employing the notion of "the unimpeded interpenetration of all phenomena" (*sasa muae*), a "quintessential doctrine of interfusion" (Buswell, *Zen Monastic Experience,* 27) that he invoked to argue that celibacy and marriage were really no different. The project was initially successful, but in the post-liberation era, hostilities—and sometimes physical conflict—between married and celibate monks for possession of the monasteries flared up. Government

intervention eventually secured the dominance of the celibate Chogye Order, which continues to this day.

17. By contrast, the Korean film about Buddhism that is best known in the west, *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East* (*Dharmaga Tongjoguro Kan Kkadalgun,* Pae Yong-kyun, 1989), simply reproduces them; it is set entirely in the mountains, and women are all but entirely excluded.
18. Kim Song-dong, *Mandala: A Novel,* translated by Ahn Jung-hyo (Seoul: Dong-suh-Munhak-sa, 1990). The two monks have different kinds of relationships and with more women in the novel, and the film makes other substantial changes, some of which are discussed below.
19. On finger-burning in Sŏn, see Buswell, *Zen Monastic Experience*, 195-197.
20. A major component in Sŏn meditation revolves around a koan (*hwadu*) that the master assigns to each novice. Pŏb-un's is the question about how to remove a bird trapped in a bottle without breaking the bottle, and his progress towards solving it is regularly raised in his discussions with the abbot. Placed between scenes involving Chi-san and himself, the unmotivated image of the birds suddenly rising from the ground suggests that Pŏb-un has solved his *hwadu* and links Chi-san's breakthrough to his own.
21. Chŏng Il-sŏng's cinematography has contributed substantially to Im's overall achievement. As well as *Mandala,* he shot *Gilsottum, The General's Son, Fly High, Run Far, Sopyonje, Adada,* and *The Taebaek Mountains* (*T'aebaek sanmaek,* 1994)—all of them distinctly alike, distinctly unlike Im's film's with other cinematographers, and also unlike Chŏng's cinematography for other directors (such as Kim Ki-yong). In all cases, the distinctiveness of the landscape photography raises the issue of Im's relation to the language of classical Chinese painting. The multi-perspectival pictorial organization of panoramic views with only the tiniest of human figures, the use of extremely high horizons that flatten visual space, the inclusion of large areas of unpainted surface, and similar properties of Sung landscape all inform Im's work, and the result is to affirm an East Asian (if not a specifically Korean) visual language.
22. Quoted in Eder, "Conversation," 34. Im continues, "My ideal camera is static. To be honest, my mobile shots, tracking and panning, are only expressions of my fear and insecurity in not having found my ideal static shot." The parallel with Mizoguchi is obvious, yet indicates not his direct influence but their origin in a common East Asian aesthetic derived ultimately from Chinese Buddhism. Other elements of camera style in *Mandala* and Im's films of this period that reflect the same aesthetic include the positioning of figures in a small portion of the screen with the rest occupied by, for example, a flat wall; the effect is to place human subjects in a visual void, again a specifically Buddhist trope.
23. Western fascination with Buddhism, including the current vogue for Tibetan Buddhism in Hollywood, is undoubtedly nourished by the same kind of sliding erotic/aesthetic affectivity that Im develops. Cross-cultural confusions, of course, follow; Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, designated by the *Los Angeles Times* as "the Vatican's chief guardian of doctrine," for example, recently attacked Buddhism as " 'an erotic spirituality' [that] would replace Marxism as the church's greatest challenge by 2000"; see John Dart, "Vesak Festival Celebrates Life of Buddha," *Los Angeles Times* (5 May 1997), B3.
24. In this essay I have been careful to avoid the assertion that these are in any categorical sense "Buddhist" films; rather I propose that in their narratives about Buddhism, the affirmation of certain spiritual and cultural principles pertaining to Buddhism and the use of Buddhist iconography and aesthetics are held in a productive tension with the critical interrogation of Buddhism's contemporary social role. In doing so, I have elided what must surely be the fundamental question for all study of the relationship between Buddhism and cinema, that is the degree to which Buddhist principles may supply a film's formal properties, rather than its thematic concerns. Stated baldly, is it possible for a film to manifest Buddhist principles and so, in some sense, to *be* Buddhist or to perform Buddhist functions, irrespective of whether its narrative is *about* Buddhism? Can the Buddhism be a function of filmic rather than profilmic or diegetic codes? For a Korean argument that Buddhist teachings are built into the process of making Buddhist art, see Dojin, "Built-in Buddhist Teachings: The Invisible Through the Visible," *Lotus Lantern* (Seoul), 1, 1 (Spring 1999), 12-13. The possibility that Buddhist meaning may reside in the cultic events a film organizes rather than in its discursivity is raised by certain Western avant-garde abstract films—James Whitney's *Yantra* and Jordan Belson's *Samhadi,* for example—that may be understood as involving processes correlative to *dhyana.* Presumably parallel issues are raised by other Western media that display meditational functions, either demanding them in the process of their manufacture or inducing them at the point of reception. Ad Reinhardt's all-black paintings, together with his admiration for the putatively timeless perfection of Buddhist art, are an especially apposite instance; see his essay, "Timeless in Asia," *Art News* 58, 9 (January 1960), 33-35. Given the history of Buddhism's syncretism, it is not likely that any essentially or exclusively Buddhist properties in traditional Buddhist culture will be categorically distinguishable from the more generally Asian aesthetic forms in which they inhere, and presumably the same syncretism allows Buddhism to operate in sympathetic Western culture of entirely different origins. Nevertheless, the question is an important one for its own sake, and also to allow for the notice of films which may deal in Buddhist iconography without having any real commitment to Buddhist values—though this is not the case with Im, as I take it. Fran Cho's study of *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East,* "Imagining Nothing and Imaging Otherness in Buddhist Film," in *Imag(in)ing Otherness: Filmic Visions of Living Together,* ed. S. Brent Plate and David Jasper (Atlanta, GA: Scholar's Press, forthcoming), is an exemplary address to the exploration of the relation between diegetic and filmic expression of Buddhist principles.
25. In the first, when questioned by Ŭn-sŏn, the abbess at her temple, Sun-nyŏ says she comes from Kwangju, the site of the U.S.-supported massacre of democratic activists in 1980. In the second, she finds a monk visiting her mother,

with whom she lives after her father abandoned them. Conniving to meet the monk, she later travels with him toward his temple, and as they walk together across bleak snowy mountains, he tells her about her father: after serving in Viet Nam, he became a monk but, when it was too late, he realized that the most precious things are achieved not by solitary meditation, but by suffering with the starving masses. And in the third, still as a schoolgirl, she develops a crush on her teacher. Again she connives to travel with him; they visit the famous cliff, Nakwha Am, where the teacher recounts the story of the defeat of last king of Paekche by Silla and Chinese forces, and the suicide of his 3,000 concubines.

26. Though Sun-nyŏ's sexual benevolence clearly reflects generic requirements and the structures of Korean patriarchy generally, it is not without precedent in the Korean Buddhist tradition. The contemporary Sŏn master, Seung Sahn, for example, has made reference to a prostitute called "Pass-a-million," who during the Buddha's time used sex to teach Buddhism; all the men she had sex with became enlightened. See Mitchell, *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha,* 65.

J. P. Telotte

The *Blair Witch Project* Project

Film and the Internet

In discussing the structure and workings of the New Hollywood, Janet Wasko cautions against attending too much to the sort of stories it is producing or the myths it so readily fosters about how those movies are being made. As she notes, "By accepting the myths or concentrating primarily on aesthetic aspects of film technology, corporate influences on film activities, as well as the actual power structure of the industry, can be obscured."[1] It is a caution that can serve us well when thinking about one of the most popular movie phenomena of recent times, *The Blair Witch Project*. A cheaply produced, independent horror film made by a couple of film school graduates from the low-profile University of Central Florida, it grossed nearly $150 million in 1999, garnered favorable critical commentary, turned its female protagonist into an overnight star, and earned both sequel and television deals for its co-writers/directors. And some measure of that public embrace of the film has to do with its apparently humble independent origins: its approximately $35,000 production cost, unsophisticated look, and unknown actors. It is, after all, manifestly unlike the high-budget Hollywood gloss with which we are so familiar and which has tended to dominate the recent box office. Yet, as the comment by Wasko might suggest, the story of *The Blair Witch Project* and its seemingly overnight success is far more complex, and that success a far larger lesson about what is happening in the U.S. film industry, particularly in its marketing efforts, than would initially seem to be the case.

In an era that has become practically defined not only by the effects of "mass media" but by the interweaving of many media, films today seldom really stand alone. Each new release operates—if it is to be at all successful—within a complex web of information sites: radio spots, theatrical trailers, various sorts of television promotions, billboards, product tie-ins, and, increasingly, the Internet. Certainly, the last of these is the newest marketing ploy, yet it is one that combines the lures of many more traditional advertising techniques: the graphic pull of posters, the hyped language of the old-fashioned press release, interviews with stars via live-time chat rooms, publicity stills, sneak previews via downloadable video clips, offers of movie-related giveaways, and selections from film soundtracks. Today, in fact, almost no major film is released unaccompanied by its own carefully fashioned "official" Web site—one that can provide an extremely cost-efficient yet information-intensive medium for promoting the movie—and often by a variety of fan-created and fan-driven unofficial sites as well. The official Web site especially not only offers potential viewers the sort of information or lures that would, after the fashion of traditional film advertising, make them want to rush out and see the film. It can also effectively tell the "story" of the film, that is, as the film's makers and/or distributors see it and want it to be understood. For it can frame the film narrative within a context designed to condition our viewing or "reading" of it, even to determine the sort of pleasures we might derive from it. This establishing of context, this seemingly secondary "project," has been one readily acknowledged factor in the larger success of *The Blair Witch Project*, and one that merits further consideration for its comments on marketing in the contemporary film industry.

Before we examine this secondary project, however, we need to note other factors that came into play in the case of *Blair Witch*. When Artisan Entertainment picked up *The Blair Witch Project* for distribution after its screening at the 1999 Sundance Film Festival for approximately $1.1 million, it continued a pattern for that minor-major studio of cheaply acquiring projects with an easily identifiable audience and then extensively promoting them to achieve a predictable if modest profit. This pattern is illustrated by such films as *The Limey* and *Pi*, the latter of which also benefited from an elaborate Web site. In the instance of *Blair*

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Witch, that promotional project certainly relied heavily on an extensive elaboration of a Web site already developed by the film's producers—hardly an uncommon add-on to the publicity push by this time, but one that has been given most of the credit for the film's success. Yet most accounts of the film's promotion overlook the extent of its *conventional* marketing project, one which included television advertising, especially on MTV; a series of ads in major college newspapers, alternative weeklies, and magazines with a young readership like *Rolling Stone*; and widely distributed posters for the "missing" principals of the film. As Dwight Cairns, Vice-President of Sony's new Internet Marketing Strategy Group, notes, "People tend to forget that the offline campaign . . . was so well integrated into what they did on the Web—the missing posters of the unknown cast, the TV spots perpetuating the myth that missing footage was found and that they should go to the site to see more. The Web was just another channel to deliver the message."[2] Indeed, Amorette Jones, head of the Artisan marketing campaign for *The Blair Witch Project* and a veteran of marketing at such major studios as Universal, Columbia/Tri-Star, and MGM/UA, acknowledges a hardly modest $20 million marketing campaign for the film that included a series of ever-more-elaborate trailers, some of which were pointedly tied to playdates for *Star Wars: Episode One* in hopes of drawing in that same audience. As Jones admits, Artisan "did commercial things; we just did them in a non-commercial way."[3]

This admission of the extent of the film's conventional publicity campaign perhaps helps to explain why other films have had trouble emulating the success of

Blair Witch. Creating a "fun" Web site to lure young viewers, after all, is a relatively inexpensive and easy path for advertising, one which even allows the studio to begin to gauge—through a "hit" counter—the extent of potential viewer interest. And given Artisan's success, it is little wonder that other studios would try to follow suit, although as yet without similarly spectacular results. Marc Graser and Dade Hayes offer a partial explanation, noting that "calmer heads are realizing that the '*Blair Witch*' site was not an added-on marketing tool, but was designed as part of the film experience—one that tapped into fans of the horror genre."[4] I would go a bit further and suggest that the selling of *The Blair Witch Project* and the *telling* of that film, its narrative construction, were from the start a careful match or "project," one that better explains both the film's success and why that success was so quickly and easily laid at the door of the now almost equally famous Web site.

Before pursuing this other project, the match between the filmic narrative and its electronic marketing, we first need to consider how such Web sites typically work, and thus why this Web site in particular might have played such a significant role in the film's success, quickly inspiring other film companies to follow suit in an effort to reach a key audience demographic online. As I have already noted, almost every major release today is preceded by a site designed to build audience anticipation for the film and, even after it has been released, to support that interest by feeding viewers additional information (behind-the-scenes facts, technical data, playdates for various markets, even the opportunity to purchase film-related souvenirs), and later to open up yet another avenue for profits by marketing tape and DVD copies of the film.

A selection of Web sites for similarly-themed films released in the same general period shows several typical levels of presentation. Those for *The Haunting* and *Stigmata* (both 1999), like the majority of official Web pages, are largely advertisements with little animation, offering basic data about the story, opening dates, and advance ticket-ordering information. Replicating the films' key advertising graphics against red or black backgrounds—colors obviously keyed to the films' horror genre—they seem like little more than electronic posters. The official *Urban Legend* (1998) and *Deep Blue Sea* (1999) sites provide a slightly higher level of information. The former, against a black-and-gold background, lists showtimes, offers credits and "behind the scenes" images, provides a library of contemporary urban legends, and invites visitors to participate in a sweepstakes contest. The latter, against a black-and-green background, offers images, text, and interviews with many of those involved in the production. Both are essentially press kits for the digital age, providing the sort of deep background typically found in their conventional counterparts. However, the Web sites for such films as *Lake Placid*, *House on Haunted Hill*, and *The Mummy* (all 1999) are far more complex affairs, not only providing the same sort of fundamental information—and measurably more—found in the previously noted sites, but also inviting a level of viewer interaction. These more elaborate sites all offer a storyline, cast list, background on the filmmakers, clips from the films, various electronic giveaways (such as downloadable screensavers and electronic postcards), chat rooms, and games keyed to the films' plotlines, set against the generically familiar black or dark red screens that immediately establish the horror-film tone. Such sites invite their visitors to linger, to explore, and, often with a few simple mouse clicks, to call the sites—and thus the films—to the attention of friends; they try to be fun and to encourage visitors to share the fun by viewing the sites and then, naturally, seeing the films.

Of course, such linkage is precisely the purpose. Thus, even as sites like those for *Lake Placid*, *The House on Haunted Hill*, and *The Mummy* provide their own level of entertainment to visitors, they also ultimately point to the film experience and suggest that we see their narratives within a tradition of cinematic horror. *The House on Haunted Hill* Web page quickly announces that the film is "a spine-tingling remake of William Castle's 1958 classic horror tale"; *The Mummy*'s site describes it as "a full-scale re-imagining of Universal Pictures' seminal 1932 film"; and *Deep Blue Sea*'s producer, Akiva Goldsman, explains that the movie is a "classic old-style horror film." While their games and on-line trailers afford net surfers a hint of the movies' atmosphere and some brief entertainment, these sites, in keeping with the long tradition of movie advertising, are basically "teasers," lures suggesting that the real thrills are to be found in the movies themselves—and in a *tradition* of similar movies. They *guide* our experience by situating their films in the context of the film industry and pointing to the entertainment power of the movies, particularly their special ability—one implicitly unmatched by the Internet—to transport us into another realm.

Artisan's own ambitious marketing campaign, and especially its Internet strategy, seems to have been designed to employ an element of this contextualizing, while also moving visitors in a direction different from the advertising sites just described. In fact, it seems to

have been fashioned precisely to avoid the sort of situating at which these similar sites aim (including the hierarchical entertainment value of the movie itself that the established film industry would prefer to affirm), seeking instead to capitalize on the particular characteristics of this film. That campaign, which ended up as a television project as well, pitches the fictional movie as a documentary about three real student filmmakers who vanished while working on a documentary about a legendary witch near the town of Burkittsville, Maryland. The story unfolds through their own footage, accidentally discovered by student anthropologists a year after their disappearance and then pieced together by Artisan. The Web site that became the hub, although hardly the sole focus, of the campaign offered much additional material about the case of the missing filmmakers: information on the "Mythology" surrounding the *Blair Witch* legend, background on "The Filmmakers" who disappeared, a summary of "The Aftermath" of the disappearance, and a tour of "The Legacy" of these mysterious events—that is, of the various materials recovered in the search for the student filmmakers.[5] All of these elements, the film's *backstory*, if you will, elaborately propagate the notion of authenticity, attesting to the film as, quite literally, a "found-footage" type of documentary rather than a fictional work, and more particularly, as a different sort of attraction than the movies usually offer, a reality far stranger than that found in any "classic old-style horror film." Rather, they suggest we see the film *not as film*, but as one more artifact, along with the materials gathered together at the Web site, which we might view in order to better understand a kind of repressed or hidden reality.

Thus *The Blair Witch* site, in contrast to those noted above, points in various ways away from the film's privileged status as a product of the entertainment industry. Or more precisely, its "project" is to blur such common discrimination, to suggest, in effect, that this particular film is as much a part of everyday life as the Internet, that it extends the sort of unfettered knowledge access that the Internet seems to offer, and that its pleasures, in fact, closely resemble those of the electronic medium with which its core audience is so familiar. *Blair Witch* co-creator Eduardo Sanchez has hinted as much when discussing the importance of his film's Web site. He offers, "It gave us a lot of hype for a little movie," while he also points to the fact that the site was effective primarily because it was so very different from other publicity pages with which Web surfers were familiar. Rather than "just a behind-the-scenes thing with bios," they aimed to create "a completely autonomous experience from the film. You don't have to see the film to actually have fun on the Web site, and investigate it and get creeped out. And that's kind of what you have to do" with such independent films.[6] While operating within what has quickly become an established, if still evolving, electronic genre—that of the official film Web site—the *Blair Witch* page does rather more. It seems pointedly designed to suggest a level of difference from other sites, and to imply as well that the film, precisely insofar as it is *like* the Web site, *differs* from other films, even those within the horror genre.[7] While it does provide what might be thought of as a kind of gaming experience, it does so in a far more complicated way than other sites; moreover, its key emphasis is on the complicated and mysterious nature of a world that would inspire such an experience. Thus, the *Blair Witch* site offered to those who had not yet seen the film but who might have heard some of the hype, as well as to those who had already seen it, a path of further investigation and a source of other, similarly creepy sensations—in effect, a *different context* for viewing the film.

And even as the site suggests that we see this film differently from other, more conventional works, it also points to the key terms of that difference, the central strategies shared by both Web site and film. To isolate these effects and better consider their implications for the film, I want to draw on Janet Murray's study of electronic narrative forms, wherein she describes how such texts, generally much more sophisticated than a typical advertising site, usually rely upon three "aesthetic principles" or characteristic "pleasures" for their lure—what she terms "immersion, agency, and transformation."[8] The term "immersion" refers to the "experience of being submerged" in the world of the text, and thus to a certain delight in "the movement out of our familiar world" and into another realm,[9] such as the complexly detailed medieval world of a game like *The Legend of Zelda*. By "agency," she means our ability to participate in the text, something we "do not usually expect to experience . . . within a narrative environment,"[10] but which is fundamental to the participatory investigation of a mysterious environment in a game like *Myst*. And "transformation" indicates the ability electronic texts give us to "switch positions,"[11] to change identities, role play, or become a shape-shifter—as freely happens in games like *Donkey Kong* and *Mortal Kombat*—within a world that is itself marked by a constant transformative potential. While not quite a game in the sense of those noted above, the *Blair Witch* site, largely because it does function as part of a larger narrative context, draws to varying

degrees on each of these pleasures, which, it forecasts to those who have grown up with the computer and the Internet, extend into the world of the film as well.

While employing the same sort of dark and suggestive color scheme as other sites, the *Blair Witch* page especially distinguishes itself by its power of immersion. Rather than pointing to the entertainment industry, it lures visitors into a world that is, on the surface, deceptively like our own, and even anchors us in that realm of normalcy with maps, police reports, found objects, and characters who evoke the film's target audience of teenagers or young adults (the missing student filmmakers and the University of Maryland anthropology class that, we learn, later discovered their film and various other artifacts). After establishing this real-world context and giving it authority, the site shifts from that anchorage into a completely "other" world, one of witchcraft, one connected to the repressed history of the mysteriously abandoned town of Blair, and one with a mythology all its own, attested to by a collection of woodcuts depicting witchcraft in the region and selections from the supposed book *The Blair Witch Cult*, which we are told "is on display at the Maryland Historical Society Museum." As site visitors move within that realm, they increasingly exercise an element of agency, exploring, like the missing filmmakers themselves, different dimensions of the mystery: gathering background on the region; pursuing the public debate about the missing students through interviews with Burkittsville locals, parents of the students, and college professors of anthropology and folklore; reading pages of Heather's diary; looking over evidence accumulated by the local sheriff, the anthropology students, and the private investigator hired by Heather's mother. Through this agency effect, wherein we sort through a wealth of clues in any order we wish and try to put the pieces of a puzzle together, much in the fashion of *Myst*, we determine precisely how much we want to be "creeped out" by the materials made available to us. And in that "creeped-out" effect, we glimpse both the site's limited version of "transformation," as well as its key difference from the film itself.

Despite the densely structured nature of this world and its invitation to navigate its cyberspace, the site never quite gives us a full range of that other "characteristic pleasure of digital environments," of transformation.[12] Here we cannot morph into another figure or become one of the three central characters; the best we can do is become the anonymous surfer of cyberspace or settle into the role of an investigator and adopt that posture as a satisfactory shift out of the self. The various interviews offered here—with, for example, Bill Barnes, Executive Director of the Burkittsville Historical Society; Charles Moorehouse, a professor of folklore; or private investigator Buck Buchanon, among others—all place us in the typical position of the documentary audience, as recipients of the direct address of these speakers. To do otherwise, to allow us, even as a kind of investigative experiment, to temporarily "become" one of the lost students, would, of course, rub against the very texture of the film toward which this site does ultimately and so successfully point. For making the experience immediate rather than mediated could reassert a kind of cinematic context, reminding us of the extent to which subject position is always constructed by point of view in film, and would thus show the film not as another artifact, co-terminous with the site, but as a kind of game played with—or on—us by the film industry. Simply put, it would work against the film's reality context. More to the point, the site mainly hints at the power of transformation because that closely allied pleasure is the payoff at the core of the film itself.

The Web site's ultimate aim, of course, is to encourage viewing the film, to help build its audience, which it does so effectively not only by allowing us these electronic pleasures, but by suggesting we might also find them, and perhaps something *more*, a content for this creepy context, in the film itself.[13] Indeed, what *The Blair Witch Project* offers is some variation on the thrills of its Web site, along with a surprising level of transformation. In fact, after a number of studios tried to emulate the Internet-heavy approach of *The Blair Witch Project*, usually without reaping the same benefits, many in the industry recognized that its success derived from the way the Web site and film function together, *share* certain key attractions. As Marc Graser and Dade Hayes explain, an initial industry frenzy to mimic the *Blair Witch* Internet campaign has given way to a recognition "that the '*Blair Witch*' site was not an added-on marketing tool but was designed as part of the film experience—one that tapped into fans of the horror genre" in a special way.[14]

In his review of *The Blair Witch Project*, Richard Corliss notes two "rigorous rules" that, he believes, account for its effectiveness as a horror film: "It will show only what the team could plausibly have filmed, and it will not reveal any sources of outside terror—no monsters or maniacs."[15] That same sense of a restricted and thus logical agency and of a real rather than fantastic situation into which we can move are also crucial to the Web site. In effect, they point toward some of the ways in which those issues of immersion, agency, and transformation, all central to the context the Web site

establishes, are key components of the film, contributing to its real-world context and conveying its specific pleasures.

The film offers us "no monsters or maniacs," no horror-movie fare of mad slashers, incarnate devils, or outsized monsters, because it is trying to immerse us in a world that, to all appearances, is coextensive with our own. In fact, the young filmmaker Heather worries specifically about making her film look too much like traditional horror movies. "I don't want to go too cheesy," she says, in a way that echoes the site's constant insistence on the real; "I want to present this in as straightforward a way as possible . . . the legend is unsettling enough." In keeping with this attitude, the film begins with domestic scenes: at Heather's house with Josh ("This is my home, which I am leaving the comforts of," she says as the film opens); at Mike's home as they pick him up and ask if they can meet his mother; at the grocery as they stock up on food for their excursion, the emphasis on buying marshmallows suggesting a typical scout camping trip. It then carefully moves us into another realm with the "ceremonial first slate" of the movie, used to introduce Burkittsville (which is, as Heather intones, "much like a small quiet town anywhere") with interviews of locals in the town and with the scene in the motel room before the filmmakers head into the woods. This location is pointedly different—the cemetery against which Heather films her introductory remarks in 16mm black-and-white quickly establishes that—but it remains a fairly known, sufficiently commonplace world, one of shopkeepers, waitresses, local fishermen. But the narrative quickly shifts into a realm in which neither the students nor the viewers can ever quite get their bearings as the filmmakers "start out off the map," repeatedly get lost, find they are going in circles, lose their map, and can make no sense out of their surroundings. And the shifting between black-and-white film and color video images only reinforces that disorientation. Finally, the climactic scene, in which Mike and Heather enter the ruined old house in the woods, recalls and mocks those initial domestic images of Heather's and Mike's homes with their implications of safety and security. We are simply left immersed in a world that has been completely transformed, one Josh had earlier, and quite accurately, summed up as "fucking crazy shit."

If the Web page is driven in large part by agency, the film links that thrust precisely to the powers of transformation. As Murray reminds us, "the more realized the immersive environment, the more active we want to be within it."[16] Yet here, after a fashion long familiar from other horror films and their limited use of subjective camera, agency is evoked only to be frustrated, creating a sense of helplessness that is fertile psychic ground for horror. Although we find ourselves moving about in this world through our subjective incarnation as the filmmakers, we exercise no real control; as in so many slasher films, and as the *Scream* films repeatedly note and parody, we cannot stop these teenagers from running out into the dangerous dark where their fates are cinematically sealed. In its use of this effect the film recalls an earlier, landmark assay in this sort of cinematic narration, Robert Montgomery's subjective private-eye film *The Lady in the Lake* (1947). That film's experiment with agency, we might recall, fell flat with audiences, as one reviewer's frustrated feeling explains: "*You* do get into the story and see things pretty much the way its protagonist, Philip Marlowe, does, but *you* don't . . . get a chance to put your arms around Audrey Totter. . . . After all, the movie makers, for all their ingenuity, can go just so far."[17] Here, though, the "pleasure"—along with the frustration—of agency dissolves into transformation, as we do indeed "become," by turns, Josh, Heather, and Mike, sharing their points of view and often even exchanging identities and point of view within the same scene, as one character's vantage through the color video camera shifts to that of another, filming in 16mm black-and-white, almost as if we were "team-playing" a video game.

That instability allows us to shift and share sympathies, as when Josh, filming Heather, upbraids her for getting them lost, while it also allows us another register of feeling when, from her subjective vantage, we see the familiar scenery that indicates they have gone in a circle, and the faces of Josh and Mike accusingly look to Heather. That same systemic instability allows as well for our acceptance of the shifty environment in which these events transpire, for our sense of a world that seems to operate from different principles and to speak in an indecipherable language of rock piles, stick figures, scrawled symbols, and strange voices. Transformation, especially via the extended subjective shot, then, becomes a key impulse that drives *The Blair Witch Project*, and a link as much to the realm of contemporary electronic narrative as to traditional horror films.

What may be just as significant as these simple alterations of extended subjective shots, though, is the film's self-consciousness, which constantly pulls us back from the typical film experience as if it were trying to reach for a more realistic context, one beyond the camera and its limited field of vision, one perhaps more in keeping with the Internet and its seemingly trans-

parent access to the world. For while the camera is a device that appears to let us capture the real, to chronicle in "as straightforward a way as possible," it also constrains our experience by restricting what we can see, as is literally the case when Josh, Heather, and Mike run out into the night and we can see only as far as the limited light on their camera. Thus Josh tells Heather that he knows why she likes the video camera: "It's like a totally filtered reality."

In fact, the film ultimately challenges, even attacks our relationship to the cinema, the technological in general, and their usual filtering effect. For its three filmmaker-protagonists eventually prove ill-equipped for dealing with a natural and transformative world: their car can only take them so far; their map and compass prove useless; their cameras and sound equipment, designed to record the real, offer no insulation against a mysterious, perhaps even supernatural realm. And by funneling our relation to the natural world, even to one another, through the technological, the narrative evokes our own sense of being lost in the mediated contemporary world. Attacked for her attachment to the camera—an attachment that makes possible the film itself, we cannot forget—Heather is told to turn it off, put it down, help figure out their position and determine how to get out of it. Her reply, "No, I'm not turning the camera off. I want to mark this occasion," seems the response of someone who is already fully lost to and within the cinematic. From behind the camera, just as back in her home, she feels temporarily secure, pointed in a safe direction, able to document the "creeped-out" experience of her companions while remaining immune from its menace. And yet she is in the midst of that experience herself and unable, or unwilling, to face her own contingent situation, to see herself as lost and endangered here. Consequently, the extreme close-up of her face—cold, shaking, nose running—at the film's climax when she turns the camera on herself, works another and most effective "transformation" here. It shows her, and perhaps by extension us as well, as a frail contemporary human, immersed beyond all insulation by her technology, involved to such an extent that she can no longer find a safe distance, transformed from sceptical reporter to helpless victim of this quaint bit of local folklore.

In describing the success of *The Blair Witch Project*, Libby Gelman-Waxner has also linked the film's technological bent and its successful computer-based promotion. As she comments, its success must be "partially attributed to the heavy promotion of the movie on the Internet, and that makes sense: It's a movie for men and women . . . who prefer to see the world entirely through technology—it's nature downloaded."[18] That is, it seems to present us with a kind of raw human experience framed by technology, a technology that allows us a safe, almost aesthetic distance on events—much as we might find on the Internet. That distance, with its built-in controls and a carefully established context, does seem a key to the film, albeit one whose import she does not quite fully gauge. For while that sense of distance suggests the film's packaging for Internet consumption, it also opens onto the film's own critique of a mediated environment, particularly of the cinema, essential to its context of difference. Perhaps it goes without saying that today's moviegoers, situated within a pervasive multimedia environment, experience the cinematic text differently, even much more sceptically than other generations of moviegoers. Certainly, the success of the *Scream* films suggests as much. But the link I have explored here points not simply to the measurably different ways in which we are now viewing and decoding those texts, but also to how our viewing experience and capacity for such decoding depend on a whole different register of experience, how various voices assist in constructing our experience, even constructing our critique of that experience. With *The Blair Witch Project*'s project, we can begin to gauge the dimensions of that construction, begin to make out what is so often obscured by mechanisms that are changing both the movies and our experience of them.

Paul Virilio has recently described the postmodern experience as like living in "the shadow of the Tower of Babel,"[19] not simply as a result of the many and different voices with which the multimedia environment bombards us but because of a certain dislocation that accompanies those various voices. For the electronic experience, he believes, with its tendency to bring together many and different places, to bind us within what he terms "glocalization,"[20] also leaves us without a real place—decentered and lost. *The Blair Witch Project*, along with its Internet shadow, seems to have effectively captured, and capitalized on, this sensibility. For it recalls the nature of the typical electronic document, the hypertext, which consists of a series of documents connected to one another by links; that is, it is a text of many fragments but no whole, no master text. And by virtue of its very lack of center, its absence of what Murray terms "the clear-cut trail,"[21] the hypertext invites us to find our own way, even to find some pleasure or profit in its very decenteredness. That absence of a center—or the lostness which the

hypertext user shares in part with the three protagonists of *Blair Witch*—is simply part of the great capital of the Internet experience, something it typically barters with, plays upon by alternately denying and opening onto it. Here it is the stuff that can effectively "creep out" an audience. It is also something that the movie industry is quickly taking the measure of in its larger project of providing the postmodern audience with its peculiarly postmodern pleasures.

With this essay, more than simply describing the relationship between film and Web site, the product and its marketing, I hope to shed some light on the contemporary film industry. In today's wide-open media marketplace, the small, virtually unknown filmmaker often seems to function as successfully as the big studio in finding a venue for his or her work. Certainly, the proliferation of independent film festivals, the opening-up of direct-to-video distribution possibilities, the appearance of media outlets like the Independent Film Channel on cable television, and even the industry-feared Internet distribution of digitized films all support this notion and, in truth, lend it some substance. The well-made, small-budget, independently produced, and star-less movie does have a chance to be seen, picked up by a national distributor or cable outlet, and then offered to a wide audience. Yet reaching that wide audience remains a troublesome project, one with which the power structure of the industry is growing familiar, and for which it is constantly developing new strategies. These strategies then must take into account the changing nature of the entertainment form itself, particularly the increasingly substantial role of the computer and its offspring, the Internet—a medium that also threatens, much as television did, to supplant the film industry, in part by offering its own pleasures to a young audience that has grown up with electronic narratives. As Murray reminds us, "The computer is chameleonic. It can be seen as a theater, a town hall, an unraveling book, an animated wonderland, a sports arena, and even a potential life form. But it is first and foremost a representational medium, a means for modeling the world that added its own potent properties to the traditional media it has assimilated so quickly."[22] And, I would add, it is a medium that, through the Internet and much as film has traditionally done, has begun to assert its own model for the world. It powerfully affirms its own authority, its own truth, its own priority at affording access to the world.

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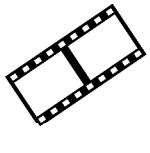
Notes

1. *Hollywood in the Information Age: Beyond the Silver Screen* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), p. 19.
2. Quoted in Marc Graser and Dade Hayes, "No Scratch from 'Witch' Itch," *Variety*, Feb. 28, 2000, p. 1.
3. Quoted in Nicholas Maiese, "*Blair Witch* Casts Its Spell," *Advertising Age*, Mar. 20, 2000, S8. Much of the commentary here on the advertising campaign derives from this piece.
4. "No Scratch from 'Witch' Itch," p. 1.
5. The four categories of material cited here correspond to the names of the four links that the main Web page offers visitors. Each one opens onto an elaborate display of images, text, streaming video, and sound files that essentially extends the experience of the movie, or as I suggest here, even offers an alternate, if parallel, experience to the film.
6. Prairie Miller, "*Blair Witch Project*: An Interview with Eduardo Sanchez," http://allmovie.com/cq/x.dll?uid=12:53:34/pm&p=avg&sq/=m1vll/176036.
7. In this context, see Wasko's reminder about the influence of television and the cable industry on film aesthetics; as she notes, "the way a film is shot and edited definitely has been influenced by new distribution outlets such as video and cable." *Hollywood in the Information Age*, p. 38.
8. *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), p. 181.
9. Ibid., pp. 98-99.
10. Ibid., p. 126.
11. Ibid., p. 180.
12. Ibid., p. 154.
13. As a measure of effectiveness, we might note the Nielsen ranking of the *Blair Witch* site. As reported in *Variety*, the Nielsen NetRating for the week ending August 1, 1999, ranked the site the 45th most popular on the Web and second among movie sites, trailing only that of *Star Wars: Episode One—The Phantom Menace.* The typical visitor in this period averaged more than 16 minutes at the site. See Richard Katz and Susanne Ault, "'Blair' Fare a Big Hit on Web," *Variety*, Aug. 10, 1999, p. 13.
14. "'Witch' Hunting: Studios Fail to Match 'Blair' Flair on 'Net,'" *Variety*, Mar. 2, 2000, p. 1.
15. "There's Something About Scary," *Time*, July 12, 1999, www.time.com/time/magazine/articles/0,3266,27736,00.html.
16. *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, p. 126.
17. Anon. review of *The Lady in the Lake*, *New York Times*, 24 Jan. 1947, p. 18.
18. "'Witch' and Famous," *Premiere* 13.3 (1999), pp. 80-81.
19. *Open Sky*, trans. Julie Rose (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), p. 145.
20. Ibid., p. 144.
21. *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, p. 91.
22. Ibid., p. 284.

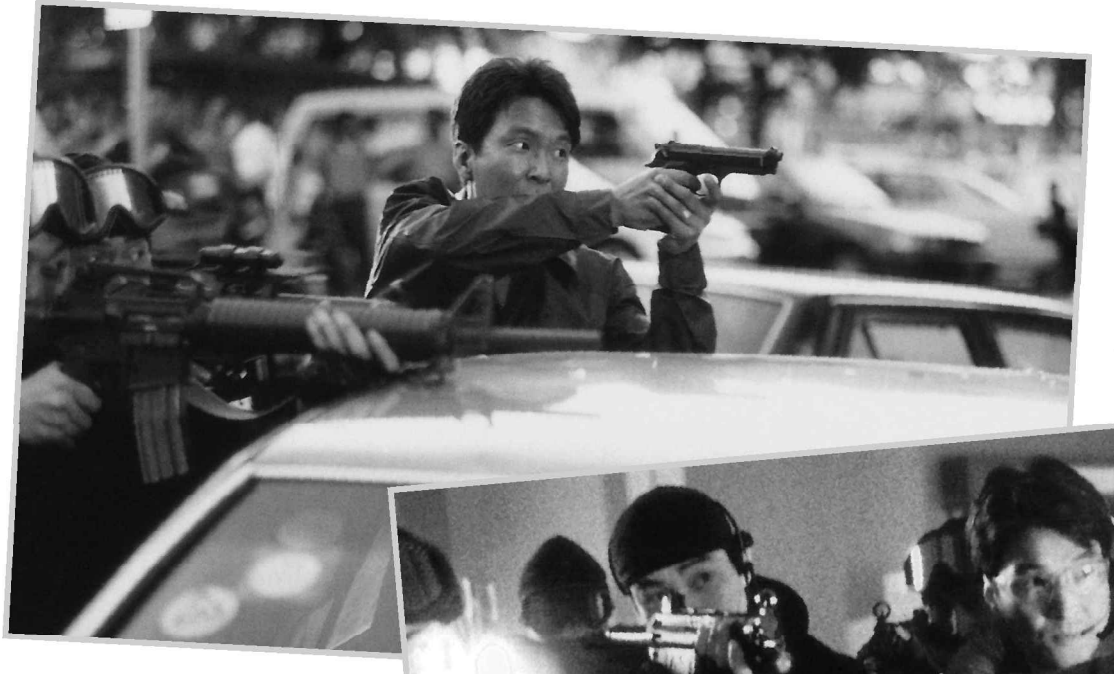


Reviews

Shiri

Director/writer/producer: Kang Che-gyu. Cinematographer: Kim Seong-bok. Samsung Entertainment.

Five decades after the Korean War, Seoul has undergone numerous seismic facelifts and been the site of extraordinary economic and industrial rehabilitation. After the 1988 Olympic Games, city-beautifying projects launched by the government to camouflage slum areas became increasingly pockmarked by edifices of commerce (high-rise apartments, towering office spaces, ultra-modern shopping malls, etc.) borne out of an aggressive capitalist enterprise. As a result, the city's geo-physical alterations have cast to the silent shadowlands the very individuals who contributed to its development.[1] Many recent films address the isolation experienced by emotionally starved Seoulites trapped in the tenement prisons of a Westernized, post-industrial wastescape. Media scholar Chung-moo Choi, looking at the "violence of modernization in post-colonial Korea," feels that this accumulating sense of alienation is figured in Korean films as a kind of emotional "brutality" indicative of the disintegration of both the traditionally configured domestic arena and the splintered national sphere. This brutality, according to Choi, *silences* people.[2]



Shiri's "ejaculative expenditure of bullets"

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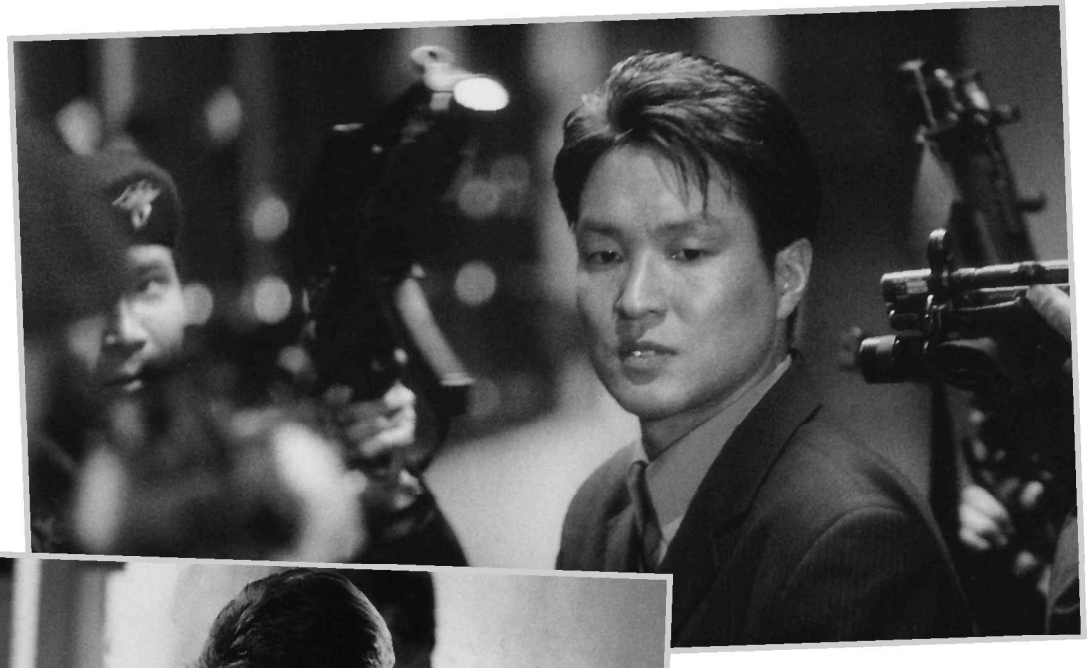
While many films produced immediately after the Korean War—the best example of which is Han Hyŏng-mo's popular *Madame Freedom* (1956)—posit Seoul as a vibrant metropolis of swinging cafés, jazz clubs, and Parisian cabarets, with no signs of the earlier ravages of war, the city's "utopian" prospects quickly gave way to a dystopic depiction of seedy slums, vice dens, and squatters' shacks, as evidenced in such classics as Kang Dae-jin's *The Coachman* (1961), Yu Hyŏn-mok's *Aimless Bullet* (1961), and Lee Manhee's *Black Wheat* (1965). The dehumanizing aura of this urban jungle eventually blanketed the films made after the notorious Kwangju massacre of 1980—a political rebellion that aroused anti-American sentiments and initiated an underground, oppositional film production/distribution network. By the 1990s, a kind of hyperreal or simulated city arose out of the cinematic ashes of Seoul, the diasporic dimensions of which are prominently on display in Park Chul-soo's *301/302* (1995), Hong Sang-soo's *The Day a Pig Fell into the Well* (1996), and Lee Chang-dong's *Green Fish* (1997).

Perhaps no other film so capitalizes on the political and personal implications of invisibility in Seoul and so literalizes the brutality of gendered silence as does *Shiri,* an espionage-thriller (directed by action auteur Kang Che-gyu, a.k.a. Jacky Kang) about South Korean secret agents battling North Korean commandos. South Korea, long seen as one of the many "others" in the global system, an object of scrutiny for the colonial gaze, adopts in *Shiri* the ocularcentricity of the American Cold War subject. In this newly configured epistemological schema, South Korea assumes



the privileged, if schizophrenic, viewing position of the Western subject, whose scopophilic impulse (the desire to *look* and *know*) colonizes the near-invisible, North Korean "other." As a result, Seoul is rendered as a visual and spatio-temporal paradox foregrounding the problems of containment and the difficulties in reading history through an ocular engagement with the world. Pan-social fear of the "other" transforms history into hysteria; visual flux transmits a virtual emptiness to the senses.

Twenty-three days after its initial theatrical release, *Shiri* demolished the previous Korean movie-ticket sales record of 1 million held by Im Kwon-Taek's *Sopyonje* (1993). Five weeks later, *Shiri* overtook *Titanic*'s 4.7 million mark and has since been seen by nearly 6 million people (approximately 1/7th of the nation's population). After its subsequent theatrical releases in Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, *Shiri* immediately became a pan-Asian phenomenon. The highest grossing motion picture in Korean history has been touted in the political, economic, and social sections of national newspapers as a symbol of Asian pride, and its depiction of espionage operations has been praised by members of the Korean national intelligence agency. More importantly, *Shiri* helped to resuscitate South Korea's domestic film market, which had heretofore been overshadowed by Hollywood product despite screen quota legislation (which currently mandates—despite pressure from the Motion Picture Association of America—that movie theaters show Korean-produced movies at least 106 days a year).

Shiri was financed by the Samsung Group, a major Korean conglomerate whose entertainment division invested 2.4 billion won (roughly $2 million) in the film's production. Though twice the budget of the standard Korean motion picture, *Shiri*'s production cost was little more than 1/50th the budget of the average Hollywood blockbuster. Yet, even with so miniscule a budget, *Shiri* displays much of the technical proficiency we associate with Hollywood cinema. Perhaps the film's singularity and huge success can be attributed to the way it fuses the special-effects-driven spectacles of Hollywood blockbusters and the melodramatic sentiments of traditional Korean storytelling. To sustain this fusion, the rhythm of the film is necessarily flexible, stringing together bursts of hyperbolic action and suspense with calm idyllic passages.

Though we might applaud the film for achieving the seemingly impossible goal of "winning back" Korean audiences and reinvigorating a state-subsidized film industry in the midst of economic recession, *Shiri* nevertheless reflects the contradictions of "cultural liberation." Because it reconstitutes countless Hollywood codes of Cold War paranoia, *Shiri*'s box-office success signals the distressing and all-too-familiar symptoms of self-inflicted cultural imperialism. As a politically conservative film, *Shiri* doesn't offer a viable alternative to Hollywood's brand of entertainment. And just as it appropriates the overblown features of the Hollywood action film (visual pyrotechnics, a huge battery of weaponry and techno-hardware, cunning arch-villains, a bombastic soundtrack, and a celebration of the male body as spectacle), so too have subsequent Korean blockbusters imitated *Shiri*'s cinematic vocabulary. However, retina-stunning, mind-numbing films such as *Yonggary* (1999) and *Suicide Ghost Association* (1999) all seem to focus on spectacles to the near exclusion of the romantic or dramatic dimensions of their stories and, though these films surpassed the box-office figures of several Hollywood blockbusters, they have all been less successful than *Shiri*.

Shiri revolves around a North Korean terrorist plot to blow up various buildings in Seoul and assassinate political leaders. Ironically enough, by seeking to provoke a war, these North Korean commandos hope to end the 50 years of shame spawned from national division and to write a new history of Chosŏn[3] by reunifying the two Koreas. Their motive is not an omnicidal impulse to destroy the entire world, but rather a vehement desire to bridge the ideological chasm geographically inscribed at the De-Militarized Zone 30 miles north of Seoul. The DMZ, which snakes along the 38th parallel drawn by Soviet and U.S. forces, still splits Korea into a Communist nation to the north and a proto-capitalist nation to the south (where, the leader of the North Koreans complains in the film, cheeseburgers and Coca-Colas can be decadently consumed while the children of the North starve).

A South Korean secret agent, Yu Jung-won (played by Korean matinee idol Han Suk-kyu), and his partner Lee Chang-gil work for O.P., a National Intelligence Service. Their mission: to arrest Lee Pang-hee, a female spy from North Korea who, after years of covert activity, has officially disappeared. Not only is Lee Pang-hee responsible for a series of murders in South Korea, but she also seems to know all of O.P.'s secret initiatives. We are first introduced to Lee Pang-hee in the film's opening montage sequence, set near Pyongyang, North Korea. A subnational terrorist group, operating outside the authorization of its own government, performs deadly militaristic maneuvers. As part

of her regiment, Lee Pang-hee is trained as an ultra-violent killing machine whose battle skills surpass those of her male comrades. Her total dedication to the North Korean cause is not-so-subtly expressed when she is shown, after completing her training, burning a family photograph. After the flame completely erases her personal history, the tempo of the film accelerates to an even faster adrenaline-pumping, Sony Playstation-like pace—the camera's spastic bricolage graphically highlighting her murderous exploits.

We then "see" Lee Pang-hee in a South Korean supermarket where the O.P. operatives have set up a meeting with a black-market weapons dealer. The arms dealer is an informant for O.P., and as he approaches Lee Chang-gil, the female terrorist can be fleetingly witnessed as a red blur in the background, her image "frosted" by the camera's shallow depth of field. Until her true identity is discovered much later in the film, Lee Pang-hee will only be briefly glimpsed by the camera, never directly sighted.

Yu Jung-won hides his identity from his fiancée, Lee Myung-hyun. When he isn't hunting Lee Pang-hee, Yu Jung-won has enough free time to take Lee Myung-hyun to a Korean version of "Guys and Dolls" and a Western-style restaurant. Only much later does he discover that Lee Myung-hyun and Lee Pang-hee are actually the same woman. Lee Pang-hee was able to procure valuable insider information through her romantic relationship with Yu Jung-won, and passes this information along to Park Mu-Young, the leader of the terrorist organization. Park wants to transcend the political corruption interlacing North and South Korea, and, having led his unit of terrorists into Seoul, invades a national science research plant. There they steal a gallon of high-powered liquid explosives called CTX, an "invisible" bomb indistinguishable from water. They strategically place the combustible vials in various locations throughout Seoul.

Shiri positions women and North Korean "others" in peripheral zones, with no clear entryway or exit (the film, for example, does not show how or where the North Koreans enter the South). The locations where Lee Pang-hee can be briefly glimpsed (rooftops, the supermarket, dark alleyways) are chaotic, spatially fragmented sites of distance, commodification, and "otherness." These zones of invisibility, as pockets of potential resistance within Seoul's ethnopolis, are difficult to freeze into a temporal instance. This difficulty can be partly attributed to the dizzying speed characteristic of the action film genre; when navigating the streets of Seoul, the calisthenic camera exhibits a resistance to spatial fixity. Rather than carefully tracing the linear contours of a sprawling cityscape, *Shiri* expresses the "urban" as if it were the focal point of a schizo-paranoid subject position obfuscating past, present, and future. Though not imbued with the demographic plurality of other hyper-industrialized cities, Seoul is nevertheless rendered as a postmodern playground, for it can only be represented in motion. To see everything at once, to sort out the discontinuous rivulets of imagery—this, the film seems to say, is the fate of the postmodern viewer. Though the schizophrenic velocity of *Shiri*'s camera accentuates the distraction factor of, ironically, the relatively stable post-IMF period, the image track is nevertheless anchored to an ideological uncertainty of nationhood and history that verges on national amnesia and is spread across a broad chronotopic palette (the North Korean terrorist leader reminds Yu Jung-won that the present can not be autonomously dissociated from earlier epochs). The capital of South Korea, cinematically painted as a city of anonymous tenement buildings, department stores, and governmental agencies, has been built atop the debris of a past forgotten by all but the North Koreans.

Space, as much as time, invokes the past and its erasure. The two prominent architectural references to the immediate past in the film are the exploding department store (which not only signifies the excesses of consumerism but also recalls the tragic collapse of the Sampoong shopping center, which killed over 400 people in 1995) and the soccer stadium at the Olympic Complex (where the 1988 Olympic Games were held). Emptiness is "imaged" as the void punctuating the center of Olympic Stadium. In the climactic battle, we are rarely shown the action of the soccer match—the game, ostensibly a joint venture by North Koreans and South Koreans to form a unified team for the 2002 World Cup Games, fails to register visually.

Culminating with a *Black Sunday*-like showdown, *Shiri* not only highlights how the coliseum functions as a fenced-off area for the performance of masculinity, but also provides an especially fascinating, encircled site of national and political convergence. In an indirect way, the climactic battle in *Shiri* also alludes to the significance of the 1988 Olympic Games in providing South Korea a stage on which to present its economic, cultural, and political advancements. The Olympic Games (boycotted by the North Korean government) put South Korea on the televisual map; sports-events were densely interwoven with accounts of Korea's people, culture, history, and developments—

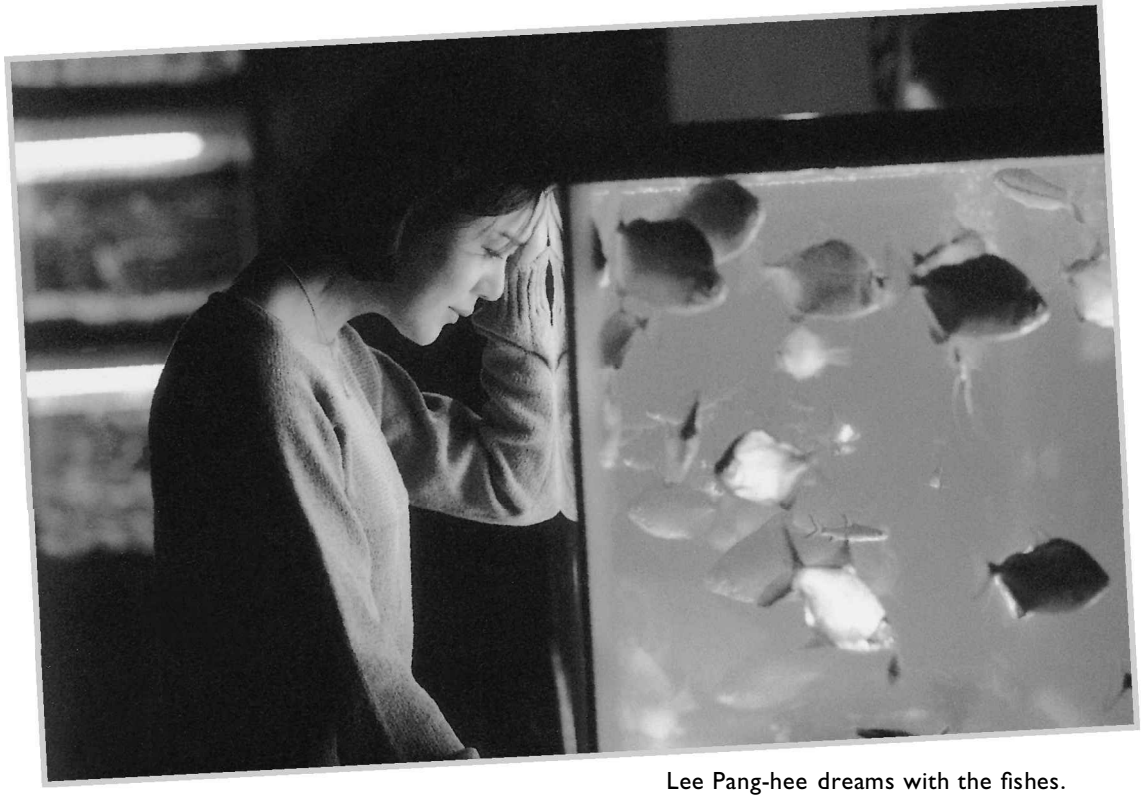
powerful images transmitted globally and sandwiched between commercial advertisements for headache medicines and Hyundais.

"Sweet revolution, I wish my woman's tears could turn into bullets."[4]

Shiri doesn't simply problematize the act of looking. As it shifts between moments of romantic reverie and hyperbolic combat, the film visually articulates invisibility by linking the elusiveness of the feminine North Korean "other" to a geo-political space that can't be effectively grasped or rationalized—a space that can be made sense of only when transformed into a stable mise-en-scène capable of containing the woman as she poses, thanks to plastic surgery, as a submissive South Korean fiancée, her docile body like that of the many fish trapped in her aquariums. (*Shiri* actually refers to a type of fish—sometimes called the Love Bride because of its graceful glide—that can survive only in the clearest, most unsullied waters.) Only during the film's many gun battles do the images swirl into a nearly incomprehensible elixir—the jerky hand-held swish pans and jump cuts so swift and fissured that the eye stumbles.

Although identity, like the swish pans that smear the scenery, is fluid and therefore not pinned to any spatial coordinates, the discourse of the "other" ultimately overshadows the trope of invisible presence and installs itself into the film as the final, face-to-face, gun-to-gun confrontation between South Korean male and North Korean female. Private passions are subsumed inside a public sphere. As Lee Pang-hee and Yu Jung-won point their pistols at each other, a swarm of officers surround them, closing the circle on the political and sexual binary that crystallizes, in a fractured image, the simplistic transparency of antagonistic positionalities. *Shiri* climaxes, as does the artier Korean policier *Nowhere to Hide* (2000), with hunter and hunted finally facing each other in a mythical standoff. Though they initially personify the "kissingurami" pair of fish that thematically meanders throughout the film ("if one dies," the legend goes, "the other will die thereafter"), only Lee Pang-hee dies; because of her all-or-nothing ideological totalism, this female martyr chooses death over love.

By changing her face and identity, Lee Pang-hee embodies (in the guise of Lee Myung-hyun) a mass-produced style of South Korean femininity and is reborn into a sphere of social conflict into which she



Lee Pang-hee dreams with the fishes.

must further assimilate. Though capable of sliding invisibly from one identity to the next, Lee Pang-hee is victim to a situational indeterminacy: as a South Korean woman, she is confined to a static sexual ghetto wherein femininity is encoded as the constant signifier of the domestic sphere; as a North Korean, she is free to move outside the frame of spectatorial desire and the traditional politics of gender, yet she is nonetheless a phantom presence whose motivations are not always legible (colliding as they do with her romantic desires). But for violence to become terroristic it must be seen, it must have witnesses who can verify not only the flesh of the criminal but also the space in which that violence is enacted. At one point in the film, another North Korean female terrorist is about to be captured; before swallowing a pill that explodes her body, she cynically mutters, "Cheers reunification." After her flesh disintegrates, and before we are thrust back into the action, we might pause to consider how her body, now invisible, momentarily made visible an idea that neither government has yet been able to bring into being.

Opposite the film's depositing of the North Korean woman into an invisible realm is the hypervisibility, or ubiquitous presence, of Euro-American capitalist culture—characterized by the film's generic heritage, its mobilization of Cold War tropes, and its prominent foregrounding of brand-name commodities. This leaves the reviewer in a quandary over how to situate the film generically. Is *Shiri* simply a Hollywood-style action flick, or a particularly Korean hybrid that mixes equal portions of tragic melodrama, political intrigue, and espionage action?

Shiri is complicitly aligned with the spectacle of male bonding typified by Hollywood's testosterone-heavy cop-buddy action films. In cop-buddy sweat-athons, male bonding is naturalized in a homosocial sphere insulated from the threat of female "hysteria." The ejaculative expenditure of bullets in *Shiri* bespeaks much more than the concentrated discharge of energy we associate with ostentatious displays of male virility; it expresses, inside the intimate arena of male violence, the "recuperational contortions" necessary to keep aggressive femininity at bay—detached from the corpus of male identity and kept recognizable from a distance.[5] The bullet's penetration of the female body is, within this arena, justified as punishment for the enemy's own transgressive penetration into a politically strafed space. After Yu Jung-won discovers the truth of his fiancée's identity, and then discovers his O.P. partner dead, the only way his sexual and national anxieties can be worked out is by redirecting them toward her body. The body of the male hero, which is generally fetishized according to his superhuman physical abilities as "spectacle" in the action genre, is momentarily replaced by the female, who becomes the object of the scopophilic gaze of both protagonist and spectator. *Shiri* thus corresponds to what Chung-moo Choi sees as "the cinematic language of gendered dichotomy" typical of Korean cinema: "men overcoming the challenges of changing time and modernizing space, while women become victims of the same social and historical forces."[6] *Shiri* seems to insinuate that this remasculinization is necessary to reassert the patriarchal, Confucian parameters that have historically defined Korea's "nationhood."

Since *Shiri* helped to inaugurate a new genre—the blockbuster—for South Korea, the film was able to generate simulacra images, the hypervisibility of which transformed a synergistically mass-marketed product into a social phenomenon that became required viewing for military officials concerned with the "North Korean threat." The discursive formations surrounding the film in print media and television advertisements capitalized not only on the commodity of Han Suk-kyu's celebrity but also on Kang Che-gyu's ability to make a film as technically proficient as a Hollywood action flick.

Though South Korean blockbusters may not exude an aesthetic originality, they certainly align with Rick Altman's pragmatic conception of genre as a syntactical and semantic orchestration of dominant values.[7] One should not overlook the fact that the blockbuster phenomenon has a particular ideological function within the broader cultural history of Korea. As a generic umbrella under which action and melodrama are combined, the blockbuster highlights how the solidification of genre and nation is contingent upon tactics of circumscription, exclusion, and "otherizing." Brimming with blood-gushing bodies, sprays of bullets, and weeping women, the South Korean blockbuster elicits a newly fabricated sense of Korean identity—one that exhibits an unsettling dependency on American Cold War imagery.

Simply put, *Shiri* is an action film. More importantly, it is a film about both the action of plotting and the action of historicizing. As such, it unleashes expectations that have already been narratively encoded. These "anticipatory blips" are written into the semantic base of genre formation and enliven what can be spoken of as a paradoxically deterministic chaos—

aleatory pulses strung out in an ever-expanding synchronic web draped over an imagined nation. The discursive formations orchestrated around *Shiri*'s narrativization, distribution, exhibition, and consumption provide a unique vantage from which to contextualize this blockbuster's role in the nation-building project of South Korea and the cityscaping of Seoul.

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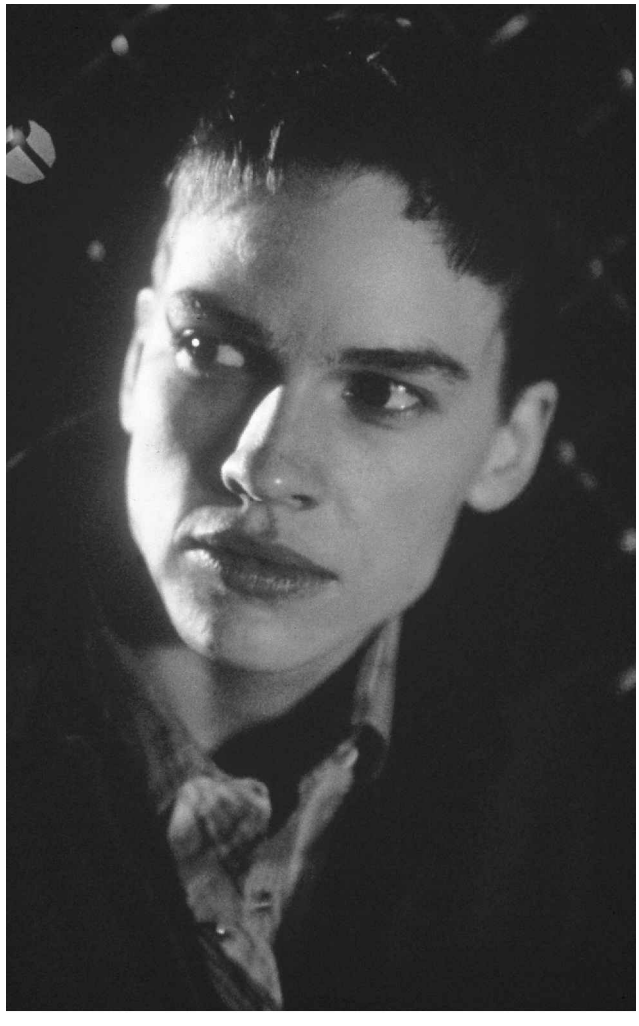
Notes

This is a shorter version of a piece to appear this spring in *Asian Cinema* journal.

1. Seoul's rehabilitation, dubbed "The Miracle of Han River," was partially achieved through the exploitation and inhumane treatment of low-wage workers (as illustrated in Park Kwang-su's 1995 biopic about the 1960s labor activist Chŏn Tae-il, *A Single Spark*).
2. Chung-moo Choi, "The Magic and Violence of Modernization in Post-Colonial Korea," *Post-Colonial Classics of Korean Cinema* (Irvine, CA: Korean Film Festival Committee at the University of California, 1998), 5-12.
3. Chosŏn is the name of Korea's longest-ruling dynasty, which lasted from 1392-1910.
4. Graffito at a school in Milan; taken from Luisella De Cataldo Neuburger, and Tiziana Valentini, *Women and Terrorism,* trans. Leo Michael Hughes (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 89.
5. Cynthia J. Fuchs's essay, "The Buddy Politic," in *Screening the Male*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (New York: Routledge, 1993), is a supple and enlightening treatment of testosterone cinema as spectacle. Here, I quote her phrase "recuperational contortions."
6. Choi, 12.
7. See: *Film/Genre* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press/BFI, 1999), for Rick Altman's discussion of "genrification," a multivalent process opening channels for negotiating center and periphery. Genrification provides a compelling way to address nationhood. The term "nation" suggests, on the surface, a certain coherency; but nations arise from conflicts—their assembly springing from the lateral debates linking members of a dispersed audience together. In the penultimate chapter of his book, Altman asks, "What can genres teach us about nations?" Though not able to provide a definitive answer, he feels that the hyphen, which sutures a descriptive adjective to a solid noun, is the "vehicle of change" for both genre construction and nation construction.

Boys Don't Cry

Director: Kimberly Pierce. Producers: Jeffrey Sharp, John Hart, Eva Kolodner, Christine Vachon. Screenplay: Pierce, Andy Bienen. Cinematographer: Jim Denault. Fox Searchlight.



"Boy-next-door" charm from Hillary Swank as Brandon Teena.

I fell in love with Brandon Teena from his first close-up in the opening of Kimberly Pierce's film *Boys Don't Cry.* A blend of Hollywood pinup and storybook knight-in-shining-armor, Brandon struck me as the perfect mix of boyish geekiness and male chivalry. He's a guy who'd slug the big kid who took your lunch money, but he'd also have been your dream date for the junior prom. Perhaps it was this awkward boy-next-door charm that captured the hearts of so many moviegoers and led to the dazzling success of *Boys Don't Cry.* At the same time, there was something rather jarring in conceiving of Brandon as a new Hollywood heartthrob. This discomfort was only exacerbated by the spectacle of sexy starlet Hillary Swank accepting an Oscar for her role as Brandon. By what weird alchemy could so many of us fall in love with a boy who is really a *girl?*

You don't have to be a lesbian to identify with Brandon Teena; in fact, his unflinching, two-fisted maleness seems to throw a punch at the category of "butch lesbian" while consolidating a "straight male" cowboy hero ideal. A convincing boy, Brandon throws into flux traditional categories of gender, sex, and desire. Moreover, *Boys Don't Cry* suggests that gender is only a dramatic persona. This cannot be dismissed as merely esoteric, newfangled, or irrelevant, particularly if we consider the real rape and murder of Brandon Teena as a ritualistic scapegoating of the transgendered individual. It is fair to say, then, that the polemics of so-called gender-bending are, or should be, a concern for mainstream audiences. The killing of Brandon Teena, which alternately shocks and titillates the viewer with its subplot of gender masquerade and violent hate crime, stands as an apt allegory for a society coming to terms with "alternative sexualities" and their destruction of a sacred order in the universe. In order to recast Brandon from the role of social misfit to that of martyr, he must be presented to us as embodying such a profound moral purity that we are *made* to feel for him.

Boys Don't Cry, like any melodrama, sublimates its messages into a visual theater of gesture. But the word melodrama leaves most of us with a bad taste in the mouth. We think of a melodramatic film in terms of predigested plots and a flat repertoire of characters: a feel-gooder damsel, a do-gooder Prince Charming, a can of worms opened somewhere in the middle. And this film, with its harrowing docudrama story line, its neo-noir intercuts of wasteland Nebraska, and its transgression of gender conventions, seems to go against the grain. However, there's no denying that *Boys Don't Cry* is a tearjerker; indeed, the pathos of victimization, rape, and cold-blooded murder marks *Boys Don't Cry* as a melodrama.

To call this film melodramatic then is to indicate that it oscillates between the exhilaration of Brandon's gender-bending and the pathos of his victimization. For the most part, pathos is expressed in the film's visual terrain. Falls City, Nebraska, is a Pandora's box where humans disintegrate from the poison of alcohol and incest, where old-guard sexism is a fulcrum for human interaction, where the women are flinchers and the men are fighters. The film's flat, posterboard landscape of power lines and two-lane roads is a visual expression of pathos and doom, as are the small Nebraskan hovels in which most of the action takes place. In the Freudian sense, this is an environment of

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repression and sublimation, and psychic evils strain to break through the thin social tissue. In one scene, Lana's mother, flaunting her thighs in a pink microskirt, dances cheek-to-cheek with the film's villain, John. Later John drugs his four-year-old daughter with booze and tries to molest her. When the kid pees on him, John lets out a long stream of invectives ("Little bitch!"), pegging him as the archetypal redneck chauvinist, someone who poses a threat not only to the female characters of the film, but to Brandon as well. Characters alternately narcotize and release themselves in orgiastic drug and alcohol binges; Lana's mom and John chug beers at the breakfast table; Lana and Katie lie on a child's merry-go-round and sniff from an aerosol paint can. The other villain, Tom, cuts himself to externalize his pathos.

But *Boys Don't Cry* isn't bleak at every moment. It is exhilarating to watch Brandon Teena prevail over traditional bedrock notions of femininity, to see him present himself not as a tomboy or tranny, but as an "ideal" heterosexual male. In the film's opening we are introduced to him in an extended close-up shot during which he spits on two fingers and slicks back his hair, tilts his chin up, straightens his shirt collar, adorns himself with a cigarette and a ten-gallon hat, and grins triumphantly at the camera. This excessive sequence of gestures coheres into an unabashed theater of maleness, particularly since Brandon is gazing the whole time into a mirror.

We watch Brandon watch himself; the narcissistic gesture seems more female than male, performed by one who considers herself to be an object of vision. But to place vanity and femininity cheek-by-jowl is to regress to gender essentialism. Perhaps this long close-up functions instead to assert the theatricality of maleness, the "feminine" self-consciousness of a boy inspecting himself in the mirror, trying to get the right "look." To this end, Margo Jefferson declares, "it wouldn't be so astonishing if she (Brandon) didn't also remind us that every boy has to practice being a boy. Getting the walk, the shoulders. . . . And finally the thrill of getting it right, having that power."[1] Jefferson configures Brandon's performance as a way to seize power rather than as a sign of feeble self-objectification.

This is not to refuse the mirror as a critical signifier in *Boys Don't Cry,* particularly in its parallel positioning of Brandon and his girlfriend Lana. In one shot, for instance, Lana stands before a full-length mirror and scrutinizes her female body. She slumps her shoulders and clasps both hands over her belly, sucking it in self-consciously, as though to express the desire for an aesthetically appealing female form, the ideal object for a male spectator. The camera cuts to a parallel shot of Brandon in men's briefs, his breasts bound tightly to his chest with elastic gauze. In this shot Brandon is positioned in the same way as Lana was, standing before a full-length mirror with his hands clasped over his flat belly. Since Brandon in this moment is unadorned in his male costume, we are made to see the similarity of the two female bodies. Moments later, Brandon puts on a T-shirt and jeans and slips a plastic penis into his pants. He waltzes back to the mirror, pointing two pistol-like fingers and triumphantly declaring, "I'm an asshole!" The scene suggests that Brandon obfuscates his sex in a theatrical guise of maleness, that his costume functions to defy, but also to conceal, the banality of his female body. This observation makes Brandon's gender masquerade at once subversive and problematic.

Gary Morris claims that Brandon's female body counterbalances his male performance with "devastating moments when Brandon is forced to acknowledge Teena—desperately binding her breasts, checking her underwear, nervously stuffing socks down her pants, practicing boy smiles and boy leers in the mirror."[2] Nonetheless, we can also argue that Brandon challenges the norms of gender in *Boys Don't Cry* by producing for himself a body that defies the categories of his sex. Kimberly Pierce describes Brandon as "a trailer-park kid who reinvented himself in his bedroom"[3] and thus bandied with the terms of gender.

The symmetry of Brandon and Lana in their stripped-down, sexed bodies is renegotiated in the film's scenes of pathos and action. In the opening scenes Brandon, performing as a male, drag-races, bumper-skis, gets into barroom brawls over girls, and escapes cops and vigilante dyke-bashers in the nick of time. This reconfiguration of Brandon under the rubric of "male" action brashly shows up Lana's pathetic "feminine" performance. As Brandon brawls with surly rednecks, Lana watches from the sidelines. Her femininity is conveyed through a vocabulary of gesture which contrasts with Brandon's male swaggering: she stoops over and combs a hand through her hair, conforming to the clichés of the fetishized female. She complains of the disconsolate life in Falls City, where she feels hopelessly trapped, she sings a pitiful country-western song, "Bluest Stars in Texas," which displaces the midwestern bumpkin's existential angst onto the gloom of trailer parks and lonely hotels. Lana relies on Brandon to save her from the ennui of the American heartland, to sweep her into a Chevy pickup and ride off into the sunset. Brandon promises to de-

Males gazing . . .

liver the nick-of-time rescue expected of the traditional Hollywood hero.

This device of contrasting Brandon's "masculinity" with Lana's "femininity" is less obvious in the scenes not involving blood-and-thunder action or tear-jerking pathos; instead, this dialectic is played out by positioning Brandon as a spectator of Lana. These scenes are eerie parodies of traditional male and female representations: Lana becomes the object in Brandon's presumably male field of vision. Of particular importance are two signifiers of fetishization: the stage and the camera.

Brandon first gazes upon Lana as she sings karaoke on a barroom stage with her friends Candace and Kate; Brandon watches with John and Tom. Again, gesture becomes an important vehicle of communication in this scene. As she sings, Lana slumps, self-consciously aware of the male gaze upon her. Brandon, Tom, and John sit with their legs spread and their heads cocked unabashedly, each pinching a cigarette between his thumb and index figure. The three male characters' gestural symmetry suggests that watching women is for them a fraternal activity, a way in which to assert their shared masculinity. This fraternal ceremony is resonant with real life; the real John Lotter said of Brandon in Susan Muska and Greta Olafsdottir's 1998 documentary, *The Brandon Teena Story,* "We went out drinking together, we'd talk about women, we'd drive around and say 'Ooh, what about that one?'" While this scene seems to ally Brandon with John and Tom as a man, it positions Lana, Candace, and Kate at the other end of the object-spectator binary. Brandon and Lana are distinguished from one another, categorized respectively as "male" and "female."

Brandon also positions himself as a spectator of Lana by taking pictures of her with a Polaroid camera. In one scene she darts coyly from the camera's gaze, hiding behind trees, placing her arms over her face, or shielding her body with her lank hair. These gestures remind us of a woman's discomfiture as an object of a man's gaze. Moreover, the camera becomes an instrument of Brandon's pursuance of Lana; it threatens to capture her female body for his male viewing pleasure. In another scene, Brandon takes a picture of Lana which she cannot anticipate: she stands at the window of the factory where she works, casually dangling a cigarette, while he positions himself far below with the camera. We see Lana's female body as an object, framed both by the window and the Polaroid camera. When Brandon calls out to Lana she coquettishly brushes her hair from her face as though to pose for the male viewer.

For a good two-thirds of the film, Brandon bravely challenges the conventions of sex and gender. His performance is galvanizing; we get butterflies watching him slyly hit on girls at the skating rink, chug beers and fraternize with other "boys," do pushups in his jail cell. At the same time, you always have an eerie feeling that this show won't hold out; even a spectator who doesn't know the real Brandon Teena story will sense that Brandon is dodging fireballs and will laugh until one hits him.

And then Brandon's masquerade begins to wear thin; stealthy bedroom searches and hearsay disclose his "true" identity to the snoops of Falls City, Nebraska. Things fall apart as the characters of *Boys Don't Cry* uncover bits of proof against the "fraudulent" Brandon Teena, from a bad check, to a pamphlet on sexual identity crisis, to a newspaper clipping which documents the arrest of "Teena Brandon." Each discovery is a stab of fear. The tension of *Boys Don't Cry* rises to a brute hysteria which climaxes in the rape of Brandon Teena. This assault on his usurped "male" body aims to punish Brandon for transgressing the long-cherished conception of gender as a reflection of sex, and the rapists act as agents of a "natural order" which dates back to Adam and Eve.

We may see this rape as the moment in which John and Tom castrate Brandon, thereby restoring his vagina

as a female orifice. In her book *Gender Trouble,* Judith Butler describes the vagina as "the site of masculine self-elaboration . . . (which) means then to reflect the power of the Phallus, to signify that power . . . to supply the site at which it penetrates, and to [be] . . . the dialectical confirmation of its identity."[4] And if we assume, for a moment, the cruel logic of Tom and John, and break down the categories of man and woman to their functions in sexual intercourse, then the rape repositions everyone according to their "god-given" gender. Brandon has a vagina, so Brandon is a woman. Tom and John penetrate his vagina, thereby reaffirming themselves as men.

Looking at Lana . . .

In an interview for *Sight and Sound,* Kimberly Pierce described the rape scene of *Boys Don't Cry* as "four frame flashes viscerally knocking into you, like memory on consciousness."[5] This is more than a simile, for the rape scene is staged as a memory knocking into consciousness, contrasted with parallel cuts of the battered Brandon Teena (now Teena Brandon?) as a sheriff bullies him to re-narrate the event. Metaphorically, the sheriff's interrogation is a second rape; it repositions Brandon as the object of violence, and again the agent of this assault is male. The juxtaposition of Brandon's "memory" of the original castration with this second castration is what "viscerally knocks into" the audience. During the sheriff's brittle questioning ("Where'd they try to pop it in first at?"), we already see Brandon as a pathetic creature, a suffering victim on whom to lavish our pity. Gesture is still his primary vehicle of communication; he expresses pathos by slumping low in his chair and shifting his eyes to the floor, as though to indicate that his powerful male gaze has been extinguished. Brandon's body no longer holds any promise for action, for it has been doubly reconfigured as an object. At this point John, Tom, and the sheriff seize control of the action, thus reestablishing their power of agency. All three exercise force over Brandon, and then exploit him as a counter-reference by which to assert their masculinity.

Submitting to the castration narrative by which Brandon is suddenly rendered female, the film repositions him as a pathetic character throughout the rest of the film. Following the rape, there is a love scene in which Brandon and Lana sleep together as two women, rather than a male "top" (note Brandon's penis, which has symbolically disappeared) and a female "bottom." In *Longing for Recognition*, Butler critiques the film's ultimate unwillingness to accept "Brandon's constant dare posed to the public (gender) norms of culture":

> Brandon is no lesbian, despite the fact that the film, caving in, wants to return him to that status after the rape, implying in fact, that the return to (achievement of?) lesbianism is somehow facilitated by that rape, returning Brandon, as the rapists sought to do, to a "true" identity that "comes to terms" with anatomy.[6]

Even while a lesbian love scene seems satisfying in the sense that same-sex love-making subverts traditional conceptions of gender and desire, we grow suspicious of Brandon and Lana's passive acceptance of Brandon's "new" anatomy. Suddenly other characters describe Brandon with the "she" pronoun, and even replace the name "Brandon" with "Teena." Only once does the film draw attention to Brandon's new female identity, which essentially has been grafted onto his "castrated" body, when Lana notices that Brandon has re-styled his crew cut to look more "feminine." Realizing the implications of Brandon's gender transmutation as an "achievement of lesbianism," she suddenly hesitates to run away with him.

The film's title seems ironic if we take it at face value, because Brandon is the "boy" who cries. But he only cries after the rape, as though John and Tom had succeeded in emasculating him. By implication, Brandon's tears symbolize his return to an essentialist no-

tion of femininity. To understand this we must consider the other weepers in *Boys Don't Cry,* namely Lana, Candace, and Lana's mother. Tears create a harmony of womanly pathos between these characters, indicating that the "castrated" Brandon is a sufferer, a weeper, and therefore a "woman." The title proves to be more than a jeer; it resonates with the chilling woman-as-pathos formula of melodrama.

The word pathos is particularly apt for the deadening scenes between the rape and death of Brandon Teena. And there is a sure contrast between the protagonist's pre- and post-rape personae. Before the rape he is a hero, a pro at bumper-skiing, girl-baiting, and beer drinking. After the rape he emerges as a pathetic creature, in many senses far more "feminine" than before. But that is to assign truth to the cliché of woman-as-pathos and man-as-action, which can't be applied to the entire film. Pierce rebels against the old adage by also giving her *male* villains the benefit of both pathos and action, showing that a single character can oscillate between masculine and feminine ways of being.

Katherine Monk writes of Tom and John, "In [Pierce's] eyes John and Tom weren't just rapists, homophobes, paranoid, self-mutilating, psychotic murderers—heck, they're people too."[7] For example, Tom mutilates himself and wears his scars like battle wounds. This "action" of striking against the self is an expression of pain and helplessness that renders Tom less "powerful" in the eyes of the audience. He says to Brandon, "Some people punch holes in walls. I gotta control this thing inside me." Similarly, John refuses to reduce himself to a Machiavellian guise of villainy. His jealous rages throw a visceral punch at the audience, and his spasms of sheer anger are undercut by a pathetic sense of fatalism. In one scene, he exhorts Brandon to pull off the highway to avoid a pursuing cop car, plunging them into an abysmal zone of dust and tumbleweed. After they are caught, John irrationally blames Brandon for "almost killing them" and steals off in the car with Lana, as though to rectify himself by seizing possession of her. In this sense, John attempts to reinstate the gender binary by announcing himself as a possessor of Lana—the male bastion who exercises power over the womanly object. With consideration, however, for the pathos which underlies John's angry spasms, *Boys Don't Cry* indicates a degree of fallacy in the gender-derived mechanics of pathos and action.

This slippage between pathos and action is also true for the rape victim, who can't be described as once-hero-now-damsel in a monolithic sense. In the scene after his rape, Brandon locks himself in the bathroom, ostensibly to "clean himself up." He begins to smash his head against the bathroom wall and tear at his hair with his fingers, desperate gestures of self-reprobation. In a sudden turn, however, he sees himself in the mirror, and his eyes light up. "I'm gonna live!" he cries, and springs out the window, escaping in the nick of time. This subversive action underscores the pathos of victimization, and keeps us rooting for Brandon.

The question then is how audiences will receive the film, whether ultimately *Boys Don't Cry* stabilizes our categories of gender, or whether it exhorts us to counter-read these norms. While the polemic of gender displacement rarely fails to rouse viewers, some responses seem ambivalent. Many react to the film's pathos, maintaining either that "*Boys Don't Cry* just depressed the hell out of me"[8] or giving credence to the "emotional savageness of . . . a great human tragedy."[9] The word tragedy is a specious recognition of Brandon Teena. If we accept Brandon only after he has been duly accused, convicted, and punished for transgenderism, then we ultimately submit ourselves to the stifling "norms" of gender.

This unsettling conclusion resonates, for instance, with Hollywood's treatment of Hillary Swank. B. Ruby Rich writes, "The boyish Brandon transmutes back again into sexy babe as Swank shows up in form-hugging dresses, batting her eyes and thanking her husband. The good news? That was all acting. The bad news? The same."[10] Rich exposes the good and the bad of Pierce's film. On the one hand, *Boys Don't Cry* pays homage to the performative nature of gender, to the idea that a sexed body can vacillate between gender identities. In the film's multi-layered theater, Brandon's masquerade was played out by Swank, who also had to reinvent herself in a generative process of gender construction. Nonetheless, our culture's neurosis with regard to sex-gender symmetry demands ultimately that Brandon be castrated and re-positioned in a female body. This occurs not only in the film, but also in the real-life reincarnation of Brandon Teena as the "sexy babe" Hillary Swank.

The resolution? We must read *Boys Don't Cry* with consideration to its gender-bending devices, and its dualism of pathos and action. These tropes operate particularly with reference to the coexistence of "male" and "female" identity in the character of Brandon Teena, whose "performance" is a useful point of departure for a critique of the cultural maxims of gender. Annalee Newitz writes that so-called gender-benders

like Brandon are not "the dupes of gender, but pioneers in a new culture where gender is optional, not mandatory."[11] This counter-reading may prove to be a challenging project.

On a final note, Kimberly Pierce writes, "A guy friend said after seeing the movie that he so identified with Brandon that he stood naked, holding his testicles, staring at himself in the mirror, wondering if he was a man or a woman."[12] This quote evokes a sense of skepticism over the crude corollary between sex and gender. On the one hand, the man's identification with Brandon is problematic, for he has been taught that men and women sit at opposite poles of a binary plane, that each sex category yields to a discrete locus of meaning which is "gender." We've always assumed that a woman is a woman, even in a crewcut and wrangler jeans. Evidently, Brandon Teena has violated these norms. The man *identifies* with Brandon rather than condemning or even pitying him; in doing so he transgresses the cultural axioms of sex and gender. The next step, of course, is for this man to accept his acceptance of Brandon, and to realize that gender categories are always in flux.

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Notes

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2. Gary Morris, "Hell in the Heartland," *Bright Lights* no. 27 (January 2000). http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/27/index.html.
3. Kimberly Pierce, "Brandon Goes to Hollywood," *The Advocate* (March 28, 2000), pp. 44-46.
4. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
5. Danny Leigh, "Boy Wonder: Interview with Kimberly Pierce," *Sight and Sound,* vol. 10, no. 3 (March 2000), pp.18-24.
6. Judith Butler, "Longing for Recognition," UC Berkeley: Departments of Rhetoric and Comparative Literature, 2000, pp. 16-17 (unpublished).
7. Katherine Monk, "Review: *Boys Don't Cry,*" CBC Infoculture, Yahoo! Movies, October 27, 1999, p. 2. http://www.infoculture.cbc.ca/archives/filmtv/filmtv_10261999_boysdontcryreview.html.
8. *Film Geek,* "Review: *Boys Don't Cry*" January 6, 2000. http://www.filmgeek.com/pages/boysdont.html.
9. James Bernadelli, "Boys Don't Cry: A Film Review." http://movie-reviews.colossus.net/master.html.
10. B. Ruby Rich, "Queer and Present Danger," *Sight and Sound,* vol. 10, no. 3 (March 2000), p. 25.
11. Annalee Newitz, "Bad Review: Boys Don't Cry," *Bad Subjects,* November 30, 1999, p. 2.
12. Pierce, *The Advocate,* p. 46.

The Circle

Director: Jafar Panahi. Producer: Mohammad Attebai. Writer: Kambozia Partovi, from a story by Panahi. Cinematographer: Bahram Badakhshani. Editor: Panahi. Winstar.

By now it's no surprise to encounter an outstanding film from Iran. It is a surprise, however, when such a film deals unflinchingly with a politico-religious issue—the status of women. Even amid the much-touted films shown at the 2000 New York Film Festival, from Lars Von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* to Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love*, Panahi's *The Circle* (*Dayereh*) stood out not only for its fearlessness but also for its fusion of human complexity, formal brilliance, and narrative tension.

It is something of a surprise that *The Circle* comes from Jafar Panahi: he is an admirer and former assistant of Abbas Kiarostami, whose films focus on reconciliation rather than confrontation. Kiarostami provided the script for Panahi's first feature, *The White Balloon* (1995), about a small girl who loses some money and encounters a variety of people before recovering it. While the film has charm and ends happily, the girl nevertheless displays a persistence and a curiosity that would be less acceptable in Iran if she were a young woman. In Panahi's next film, *The Mirror* (1997), there's an even more self-willed girl: when her mother fails to meet her after school she attempts to find her own way home. Then the young actress herself (apparently) asserts her independence and refuses to continue acting. She walks off, although the crew manages to follow her. Even if the actress's mutiny was scripted, it nonetheless raises the idea of a female rebelling against her assigned role in Iranian life.

Following the release of *The Mirror*, an Italian interviewer asked Panahi why he chose girl protagonists rather than women. Panahi replied: "There are strict limits [in Iran] on what women may perform, and that's why they are little utilized, not for any lack of fine actresses. I hope in the future there will be filmmakers who can break out of that situation."[1] That future came in two years, with Panahi himself making the breakout. In *The Circle*, men have only supporting (or in most cases, opposing) roles. The main characters include three women who have escaped from jail (one of whom is also trying to get an abortion), a prostitute under arrest, and a mother who feels compelled to abandon her infant daughter. The film cannot be shown in Iran.

Certainly there are earlier Iranian films that have dealt with the plight of women, but none that I know of approach the uncompromising bluntness of *The Circle*. In *Leila* (Dariush Mehrjui, 1997), a husband takes a second wife because the first is barren; but it's only his mother and his self-sacrificing first wife who push

Escapees from jail—but still trapped

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him into it, not society at large or (God forbid) theocratic power. In *Zinat* (Ebrahim Mokhtari, 1994), a young woman runs a village clinic for women and children, but her fiancé and both sets of parents insist that she quit. When she refuses, her father locks her up. After the marriage, a woman brings her seriously ill small daughter to Zinat, who performs a tracheotomy against her husband's wishes and then insists on taking the girl to the nearest hospital. The husband now smiles and helps her—a suspiciously abrupt happy ending. *The Spouse* (Mehdi Fakhimzadeh, 1994) goes so far as to show a wife vying with her husband for the position of CEO in a drug company and eventually winning. But any bite in this ending is weakened not so much by the final smiling reconciliation between the spouses as by the mix of melodrama and comedy and by the exclusion of everyone outside the world of plush upper-middle-class homes and corporate offices. Best of all is *The Day I Became a Woman* (Marziyeh Meshkini [wife of Mohsen Makhmalbaf], 2000), a three-part film that moves from realism to surrealism, with a superb second episode about a woman who enters a bicycle race against the wishes of her husband.

The Circle, by contrast, plays out almost entirely on the streets of Tehran and in public buildings. It opens in a maternity hospital with a mother being told that her daughter has given birth to a girl—not the boy that tests had predicted. "The in-laws will want a divorce," says the dismayed woman, and sends another daughter out to warn the rest of her family. The camera follows the daughter out to the street, but then stays with three women at a telephone booth. They have just escaped from jail.

One of them goes in search of money but is stopped by policemen and taken away. The other two, Arezou and Nargess, run off. The older Arezou sells a gold chain so that Nargess can buy a bus ticket out of town. Nargess reluctantly leaves for the bus terminal, sees policemen checking the passengers and runs out. She goes to the home of Pari, another escapee, but Pari's father curses both of them, and her two brothers arrive in a fury as Nargess leaves. Shortly afterward, Pari manages to escape from the house—and now the camera stays with her.

After visiting one ex-jailmate at the movie theater box office where she works, Pari goes to another, Elham, a hospital nurse. Four months pregnant, Pari wants an abortion, but she cannot get one legally without the permission either of her husband (who has been executed) or her father. Elham, married to a doctor who knows nothing of her past, finally says she can't help. Pari leaves the hospital and out on the street she asks a woman with a little girl for the name of an inexpensive hotel (it's now nighttime). There's one nearby, but a policeman is checking the register. Backing away, Pari notices that the little girl is now alone; then she spots the mother, Nayereh, hiding behind a car across the street (the film's one coincidence that seems too pat). Nayereh explains to Pari that she can't afford to keep her daughter. When a police jeep arrives to take the girl, Pari runs off; the camera stays with Nayereh.

A man in a car persistently offers her a ride. She eventually accepts, only to find that the man is a police inspector who has entrapped her as a presumed prostitute. He takes her to a roadblock where police are detaining other women and men found "illegally" in cars together. A prostitute watches impassively as her would-be john persuades the inspector to let him go.

As Nayereh slips away, the camera stays on the prostitute, who's taken to jail. She looks around the cell: her fellow inmates include Pari, Arezou, and Nargess. A fifth, never-seen woman is also in the jail: a guard is calling for Solmaz—the woman who at the beginning of the film gave birth to a girl instead of a boy.

While the film's locations convey a vivid realism, the narrative is stylized even beyond its circular chain of characters. By choosing a time span that is clearly less than 24 hours, Panahi disregards the literal implausibility of a woman's giving birth in the morning and being in jail by the evening, but creates a relentless metaphorical transition from light to dark. (The first scene in the film is the white hatch in the maternity hospital door through which Solmaz's mother speaks to the nurse; the last scene is the dark hatch in the door of the prison cell as the guard shuts it.) To maintain the pressure of events, Panahi and writer Partovi omit explanations that might at first seem necessary: why the three were in jail, why Pari's husband was executed, why Nargess has a raw bruise on her cheek, and so on.

Like most of Kiarostami's films—and unlike *Leila*, *Zinat*, and *The Spouse*—*The Circle* has no music score. Background noises, terse dialogue, and tense silences set the tone for most of the film. Arezou and Nargess speak to strangers (and for that matter, to each other) only when they have to. The prostitute, onscreen for five or six minutes, has only about ten seconds of speech. Pari, in the hospital, remains silent between Elham's comings and goings. The only relaxed conversation in the film is between Pari and her ticket-seller friend. Sounds are as oppressive as the silences—and not just the roar of Pari's brothers' motorbike as they narrowly miss Nargess on their way to attack their sister, or the rowdiness of the wedding party whose cars pass the "illegal" couples near the end. The

continual big-city background noises (traffic, sirens, machinery, the blur of voices, PA announcements in bus depot and hospital) suggest both the danger and the indifference that surround the escapees.

Within the images, the mere sight of a policeman is a sufficient hint of danger, but to reveal indifference, Panahi has his escapees move through virtually documentary situations of street life and people at work. Since most of the people busy with their own affairs are men, these scenes also highlight the lack of freedom for Iranian women in general. Some of the locations assume metaphorical force. On the street, the escapees are exposed to possible capture, while buildings are places of danger rather than shelter—the commercial honeycomb into which Nargess anxiously watches Arezou disappear in order to sell the gold chain; the sprawling bus terminal from which Nargess has to flee; Pari's home from which she has to flee; the hospital in which Elham shuttles Pari from place to place to avoid an encounter with her husband. (By coincidence or not, both the commercial building and the bus terminal are circular in plan, so that Arezou in the former and Nargess in the latter are obliged to walk in arcs.) Even the brief respites from the pressure are double-edged: Nargess has a few moments of delight as she stops to look at a painting of what she thinks is her home village—in reality, a copy of Van Gogh's *Wheat Field with Cypresses*; Pari enjoys the talk with her ticket-seller friend—inside the cramped cashier's booth whose window resembles a barrier between prisoner and visitor.

The film's chain-like structure has several precedents (including *La Ronde* and *Slacker*), but Panahi frees it from any sense of repetition or routine. By choosing only six links, he gives himself the time to make varied and powerful use of the transitions from character to character. The first transition—from the woman leaving the maternity hospital to the three escapees—startles with its unexpectedness. The sequence with Arezou and Nargess shifts to Nargess alone with a diegetically emotional parting but no filmic break, and the two sequences go on long enough for the swerve to Pari to come as another shock. With Pari, not only the length of her sequence but also the scope of her contacts with two different friends and with Nayereh seem to establish her securely onscreen—until she too abruptly disappears. These startling breaks, which remind viewers that they have no control over what they see on the screen, brilliantly reflect the women's lack of control over their lives.

This analysis of the film's structure might suggest that the women characters in *The Circle* are little more than puppets caught in a mechanically closing trap. Far from it. The women are all distinct, yet the players avoid any embellishments that could hint "I am indeed one of Panahi's 'fine actresses'"; they might almost be acting out their own lives. At the same time, though no viewer is likely to expect a happy ending, the film is replete with incidents and details that generate a continual oscillation between surprise and suspense. Here is just one example: the sequence of Nargess at the bus terminal.

Running for her life

Nowhere to hide

Since Nargess has appeared naïve and dependent on the older, self-confident Arezou, I expected her to miss the bus through some failure of her own. At first she does appear bemused in the crowded terminal, but once she finds the ticket office, she manages to hold her own with the clerk, who first says the bus is full but at her insistence admits that there is a (presumably "unfeminine") seat at the back. Then, when he objects that she must either have an accompanying man or show student ID, Nargess doggedly repeats that she's a student but doesn't have her ID with her, and eventually he relents. When she finds that the bus is leaving in ten minutes, she goes back inside the terminal and looks at the shops.

Now I thought she would miss the bus by losing track of time. She enters a clothing store to buy a shirt for a young man (it's never specified whether he's a brother or a boyfriend). Since she doesn't know the size, the breezy clerk asks if a soldier who's just come in resembles the young man, and spreads the shirt out on his chest for her to judge. At this point I thought that the soldier would question her, or at least delay her long enough to miss the bus. He doesn't, but the clerk offers to gift-wrap the shirt and she waits for that. After finally leaving with the shirt, she glances out of the window and stops, horrified. Then she runs upstairs to a less crowded floor and looks out again. Only now does the camera pan to show her view of the policemen at the door of the bus. Still clutching the shirt she runs out of the terminal to start a hopeless search for Arezou. This sequence is as tense as any in a Hitchcock film.

The comparison with Hitchcock is not arbitrary. When Panahi was a student at Tehran's College of Cinema and Television, he says, "I liked studying Hitchcock to see if he made any mistakes."[2] Other scenes in *The Circle* deploy such Hitchcockian tactics as delaying the disclosure of information or heightening the threat of a person or object by allowing only incomplete or out-of-focus glimpses. At the hatch in the maternity hospital, only the back of the dismayed mother's *chador*-covered head is seen for well over a minute before she turns away; Elham's doctor husband is glimpsed either out of focus in the background or behind a partly open frosted-glass door. Such scenes involve the viewer in the women's sense of ever-impending danger. Politics becomes personal.

It may be impossible to make a political fiction film that is at once enthralling, convincing, and effective. A serious attempt runs the risk of dryness and abstraction, and if it challenges a majority view it will reach only a limited audience, most of whom already sympathize with the filmmaker's position. A popular attempt too often oversimplifies and trivializes, and its view will be one to which most people can at least pay lip service. *The Circle*, being banned in Iran, obviously cannot be directly effective, and any indirect effect is problematic. But the film can be, and is, both enthralling and convincing. The women are not heroines; they are simply struggling for survival and some kind of freedom. They are not a collective standing shoulder to shoulder—some help each other, others do not—but they all face the same ultimate problem. *The Circle*, through its trenchant structure and details, brings the viewer as close as possible to experiencing that problem.

Earlier I compared *The Circle* with four other films about Iranian women. It is even more revealing to see Panahi's film as a fortuitous complement, or even sequel, to Samira Makhmalbaf's *The Apple*, which focused on the real-life liberation of two 11-year-old sisters whose parents had never allowed them out of the house.[3] While that situation stood metaphorically for the plight of all females, the fact that the sisters were children gained them widespread sympathy in Iran. *The Circle* shows what happens when girls grow up and sympathy evaporates.

William Johnson is the New York editor of Film Quarterly.

Notes

1. From an interview with Panahi by Nicola Falchiella in *Vice Versa* (www.landscape.it/viceversa/film/intervistajafarpanahi.htm). Translation mine.
2. Cited in "An Iranian Director Enters a Circle of Women," *International Herald Tribune*, September 21, 2000.
3. See my review of *The Apple* in *FQ* Vol. 53, No. 2 (Winter 1999–2000).

The Filth and the Fury

Director: Julien Temple. Producers: Anita Camarata, Amanda Temple. Editor: Niven Howie. Fine Line Features.

You might say that a single image from *The Filth and the Fury* defines the hysteria that engulfed London's punk rock scene in 1977: Sid Vicious, on stage, spraying spit directly into the camera's eye. In the words of one British television news anchorwoman at the time, "Raw, outrageous, and crude!" For those old enough, it's not hard to recall the nightly news flashes that greeted the Sex Pistols when they made their assault on the United States in January of 1978. Since their collapse at San Francisco's Winterland on that tour, a sizable legend has grown up around the band. This delirious documentary, which Julian Temple is credited with directing, purports to tell the "truth" about their story. But the film is less an attempt to give a historical account of the band's rise and fall than it is a claim, by the band's surviving members, for credit for the Sex Pistols' powerful cultural impact. Temple serves as a facilitator for this agenda and the film is always candid about its biases.

Although the Pistols were heavily influenced by their predecessors in the New York underground rock scene—particularly the New York Dolls and Iggy and the Stooges—they, more than any other band, defined the image and attitude of punk. The combustible combination of a highly calculated campaign of provocation by the band and its representatives and a feeding frenzy among the British tabloids propelled this quartet of spiky tops to worldwide infamy. If the Sex Pistols have any legacy at all, they can claim to have changed the course of fashion and attitudes much more than music.

The subtext of *The Filth and the Fury* is the fight over the true authorship of the whole cultural phenomenon surrounding the Sex Pistols. In one corner is Malcolm McLaren, the boutique owner and erstwhile art student who managed the group. In the mid-1970s, McLaren owned a fashionable shop on the King's Road called Sex that was the incubator from which the band emerged. For years McLaren, not entirely unjustifiably, claimed—in innumerable rockumentaries, interviews, and the pages of *The New Yorker*[1]—to be the impresario who had engineered the excitement and enormous volume of publicity that accompanied the Sex Pistols' every move. It was also his girlfriend, British punk fashion designer Vivian Westwood, who had a hand in styling the look of the band. (She shows up, without being named, in a single portrait shot in the film.)

The Sex Pistols: (left to right) Paul Cook, Sid Vicious, Johnny Rotten, and Steve Jones

A few years before the Sex Pistols came together, McLaren had ventured to America and become the manager of the prototypical glam rock band the New York Dolls. During the Dolls' final throes, he used his keen eye for fashion to study the New York scene, and returned to England with some definite ideas for style and image. It was his dream to meld music and politics into situationist pranks. In 1980 he took the opportunity to tell his side of the Sex Pistols' story in *The Great Rock and Roll Swindle*—a film composed of a series of fictionalized sketches, also "directed" by Temple (he actually recycled some of the footage for *The Filth and Fury*). But in the case of both films, Temple is more like a hired gun than an auteur. As an early follower of the band, he made himself indispensable by filming the group almost from its inception. In McLaren's words, the Pistols were a "cash for chaos" scam he perpetrated on the established record companies and authority figures of bourgeois society. In *The Filth and the Fury*, he claims—in a voiceover recording from an old interview—that "creating something called the Sex Pistols was my painting, my sculpture."

In the other corner is John Lydon, a.k.a. Johnny Rotten, the lead singer and most intelligent and articulate member of the group. He was recruited by McLaren to be the band's charismatic frontman. He auditioned in McLaren's shop, singing over the sound of Alice Cooper's "Eighteen" belting out of the jukebox. At the age of twenty, Johnny Rotten was an alienated and rebellious youth who questioned the relevance of the fashionable peace-and-love hippy philosophy in

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Malcolm McLaren (left) and Steve Jones

an age when every young person in England seemed to be on the dole.

Part of what made Johnny Rotten such a commanding stage presence was his refusal to be governed by the norms of popular entertainment. "This band," he asserts in the film, "was not about making people happy. It was about attack! Attack! Attack!" On stage, he appeared crazed and wild-eyed in a ripped-up jacket adorned with crucifixes, buttons, and safety pins. He shouted taunts at the audience. He embodied the complete subversion of prior conventions and expectations in concert performance. After the sudden disintegration of the whole spectacle in January of 1978, Lydon initiated a legal action against McLaren to gain control of the Sex Pistols' commercial interests. Not unsurprisingly, he disputes McLaren's claim to being the creator of the band's look and provocative political stance: "You don't create me," he sneers.

The most remarkable thing about *The Filth and the Fury* is the incredible amount of period file footage and news broadcasts the filmmakers unearthed for the project, much of it taken from Temple's archive of vintage home videotapes. The degraded color images are pitch-perfect for punk. They recapture, with a certain humor, the social pain and misery of a once proud English nation. Temple assembled long-lost Super-8 movies of the streets of London and performance videos of hip popular acts like David Bowie and Roxy Music to illustrate what youth culture was like immediately prior to the Sex Pistols. The almost exclusive use of contemporary footage effectively anchors the film in the past. Added to this are cartoon animated sequences recycled from *Swindle*, a selection of extracts from Lawrence Olivier's histrionic rendition of *Richard III*, and an assortment of clips of British slapstick comedians that lend the film a distinctive national feeling as well as a persistent undercurrent of low comedy.

The "narrative" begins with Lydon pontificating on the sociological origins of the strikes, riots, and pervasive discontent that afflicted the country in 1976. He surveys England's economic conditions and simmering class conflicts, and the failures of the Labour Party, then each of the surviving band members gives an account of his background and childhood experiences. They all came from working-class families, felt unwanted, and failed at school—models of delinquent youth resistant to authority and filled with inchoate rage.

During their early rehearsals and gigs, one can see the band defining itself as a do-it-yourself antidote to the bloated progressive rock supergroups that were dominating the airwaves. Their own music was a brutal blast of noise with a venomous attitude on the vocals—Johnny Rotten's discordant voice shouting angry words of nihilistic protest. Although the Sex Pistols were rank amateurs who could hardly play their instruments, their stripped-down, primitive style resonated with disaffected youth and created a new teenage cult with street stars like Billy Idol and Siouxsie Sioux.

The pivotal moment that catapulted the band to notoriety was their infamous December 1, 1976 appearance on the Thames TV's "Today Show" with Bill Grundy. The host and the lads showed mutual contempt, Grundy ultimately provoking a torrent of profanity from Rotten entirely unsuitable for broadcast television. It made the Sex Pistols front-page news.

From that moment on the band was public enemy number one. They were dropped from record companies anxious to preserve some semblance of respectability. They were banned from performing in numerous towns across the English countryside. The ultimate affront to propriety came on June 7, 1977, when McLaren orchestrated—in honor of the Silver Jubilee celebrating the 25th anniversary of the queen's accession to the throne—the premier performance of the band's outrageous song "God Save the Queen" aboard a boat sailing near the queen's flotilla on the River Thames. This irreverent tweaking of royalty created a national scandal. The next day, "Punk Rock Jubilee Shocker" was emblazoned on the front page of one tabloid. The Sex Pistols' record went straight to number one, but the band's shock tactics so offended public sensibilities that the song was "listed" on the British charts by a black line in the top slot. Record stores refused to sell it; the BBC refused to play it. As Lydon tells it, "We declared war on England without meaning to."

By then, external pressures had fractured the internal dynamics of the group. Rotten instigated the ouster of bassist Glen Matlock. He was replaced with Sid Vicious, an avid follower of the punk movement

Johnny Rotten (left) and Jones

and an adoring fan of the Pistols. According to guitarist Steve Jones, "He was a face." In an interview that Temple conducted with Sid at the time, he says, "I just cashed in on the fact that I'm good-looking, girls like me, and I have a nice figure." A considerable amount of the lore generated by the Sex Pistols concerns Sid's toxic relationship with Nancy Spungen (Jones comments, "Everyone knows when a bird starts poking her nose into a rock-and-roll band it's fucking suicidal"). This dope-and-circus atmosphere only exacerbated tensions among the members.

Frustrated by the official response to their antics in England, the band embarked on an ill-fated tour of the American South, playing to hostile crowds in out-of-the-way cow palaces with names like Randy's Rodeo and the Longhorn Ballroom. Sid Vicious took the stage shirtless, with the words "Gimme a Fix" carved into his chest. The band was pelted with bottles and flying debris.

So, does *The Filth and the Fury* really set the record straight? As the version of events authorized by the surviving members of the band, one expects the film to take their point of view. But it goes much further than dispelling misconceptions or debunking the notion that the Sex Pistols were merely marionettes manipulated by puppetmaster Malcolm McLaren. In the film's semi-tragic third act, McLaren is squarely blamed for the acrimony and dissention that precipitated the band's sudden breakup, and denied any credit at all for the Pistols' style, image, and cultural impact. One cannot but suspect that the film's secret agenda is to exact revenge and settle old scores, rather than reveal the truth.[2] Yet, in its own playful way, *The Filth and the Fury* does manage to transport the viewer back to 1977. One of the virtues of airing the long-unseen footage is that it recreates the London street subculture for the considerable portion of the film's intended audience who weren't even born then. The film's unconventional use of collage juxtaposes a cacophony of source material into a symphony of vivid remembrances. And it doesn't try to gloss over the irony of how an anti-establishment, anti-commercial band hell-bent on fomenting anarchy was ultimately commodified and absorbed into mainstream culture.

While being candid about the band's failure to make an enduring political or cultural impact, the film fails to disclose its partisan position when it makes assertions about who can rightfully claim credit for the Sex Pistols' astonishing notoriety. The truth of the matter is that it was most likely the combination of McLaren's flair for publicity and Rotten's offensive persona that made them so infamous.

Eric Bryant Rhodes' review of Oliver Stone's *U-Turn* appeared in the Winter 1998-99 issue of *Film Quarterly*.

Notes

1. Malcolm McLaren, "Elements of Anti-Style," *The New Yorker*, September 22, 1997, pp. 90-102.
2. This is partly explained by the story of the film's production. See the official film Website: www.filthandfury.com/htmlnoflash/who_production.html.

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Book Reviews

Alien Zone II

The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema

Edited by Annette Kuhn. New York: Verso, 1999. $83.50 cloth; $22.00 paper.

Alien Zone II proves a very worthy sequel to its 1990 predecessor, *Alien Zone*. Annette Kuhn has again compiled an excellent collection of essays by highly respected authors that not only examines recent science fiction cinema but also explores the changes in film scholarship and methodologies over the past ten years.

Alien Zone took a cultural studies approach to the genre, emphasizing what Kuhn labeled the "cultural instrumentalities" of science fiction cinema. Employing rather classical approaches to film analysis (social, ideological, psychoanalytical, and feminist), the volume's contributors addressed the themes, iconographies, and postmodern intertextualities of mostly 1980s science fiction cinema. Yet this anthology contained the seeds of its successor; Kuhn proved very aware of the future of science fiction studies. In *Alien Zone*'s introduction, she commented that

> in science fiction cinema, spectacle can become an end in itself: spectacular visual effects and sounds temporarily interrupt the flow of the narrative, inviting the spectator to contemplate, with awe and wonder, the vastness of deep space or the technological miracles of future societies. (7)

After questioning the process of how the technology of special effects generates spectatorial pleasure, Kuhn proceeds to a section (Part IV) on cinematic enunciation, spectatorship, and scopophilia. In 1990 she asked "whether any consistent modes of enunciation are associated with science fiction as against other film genres?" (146). At that time she was unable to answer because "this question, unfortunately, appears to have received little or no attention—another gap in critical work on science fiction" (146). Ten years later, *Alien Zone II* demonstrates how that critical gap has been impressively filled.

In her new introduction, Kuhn basically asks the same question: "Are there modes of cinematic enunciation [specifically] associated with science fiction cinema as against other film genres?" (3). Recognizing that science fiction themes and iconography are not unique to science fiction *cinema,* she posits that the main site of difference is cinematic address, "the manner and context in which films are consumed, and the ways in which they interpellate . . . the spectator" (4-5). Stressing a "phenomenology of vision" that examines the "sensuous immediacy of the viewing experience" (5), Kuhn argues that spectacle and special effects generate a sense of the sublime from technological expression:

> The enticement is not narrative involvement, nor even identification with characters, but rather the matters of expression of cinema itself, and [a] film's awe-inspiring unfamiliar imagery. Spectators are invited to gape in wonder and abandon themselves to the totality of the audiovisual experience. (5)

As the subtitle of this new anthology indicates, Kuhn chooses the topos of cinematic space as a unifying theme. She charts a theoretical shift from diegetic space (with its focus on the film text) to spectatorial space (with its focus on the metapsychology and cultural context of cinema). Acknowledging the co-dependency of these two arenas, their historical specificity, and new methods of media distribution and consumption outside the cinema (DVD, TV, the Internet), she claims that "the classical spatial model arguably remains serviceable"; that consumers of science fiction cinema engage "diegetic, spectatorial—and perhaps . . . other —spaces [that] are rather different from those proposed by classical cinema or classical film theory" (7). So, "What then is distinctive about the spaces of science fiction cinema? And how might these spaces be conceptualized in relation to science fiction films?" (7), whether consumed in the theater or via other modes of delivery. How does "space" function as a kind of cinematic enunciation and within a phenomenology of vision? How does a consumer engage science fiction films in terms of a metapsychology of viewing?

Kuhn offers four types of spaces for consideration: cultural, city, corporeal, and sensuous. She introduces each space with a compelling overview and perceptive comments about each author's essay. In Part I, "Cultural Spaces," she revisits the "cultural instrumentalities" of science fiction cinema. But instead of pursuing themes, iconographies, and intertextualities as she did in *Alien Zone,* Kuhn directs the discussion toward the role of technology as it constitutes diegetic and spectatorial space. How is subjectivity (spectatorship) developed through textual (diegetic) organization? Barry Keith Grant answers this question by addressing special effects and their inherent self-reflexive celebration. Brooks Landon investigates interactive hypertexts and how they transform the viewer of a text into a user of a text. Will Brooker looks at Internet discussion groups and the creation of extratextual materials. Each essay in this section probes how technology can form a symbiosis between diegetic and spectatorial space—in effect constructing a new "other" space—in which consumers experience science fiction with a sense of childlike wonder and, as fans, generate (sub)cultures.

In Part II, "City Spaces," Kuhn organizes the essays in terms of urban utopias and dystopias. "Science fiction cityscapes invariably invoke cultural meanings around, for example, scientific progress, urban decay, nuclear holocaust . . . political questions, and . . . modes of social organization" (76). David Desser examines architectural space as a metaphor of race, class, and power. Janet Staiger sees "future cities" as ironic, postmodern expressions of "real-world urban social reform, utopian architecture and progressive town planning" (77). Vivian Sobchack explores the phenomenological relationship between images of science fic-

Film Quarterly, Vol. no. 54, Issue no. 3, pages 60-67. ISSN: 0015-1386. © 2001 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Send requests for permission to reprint to: Rights and Permissions, University of California Press, Journals Division, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223.

tion cityscapes and real urban experiences. In all instances, the city as "place" organizes diegetic and spectatorial space. The image of the city functions as cinematic enunciation as it engages a phenomenology of vision.

In Part III, "Corporeal Spaces," Kuhn groups the essays around the human body as it occupies space textually, virtually, and literally. Employing feminist, cultural studies, and ideological methodologies, the essays examine gender and technology through "figurations of the body" (148). Linda Mizejewski analyzes the exaggerated muscularity of the male bodybuilder star in hybrid action/science fiction films. Catherine Constable extends and challenges the feminist debate over the *Alien* series by focusing on the female and/as alien body. Claudia Springer looks at the cyborg and its contradictory position in postmodern science fiction films. Like the city, the human body here organizes subjectivity and provides access to a metapsychology of viewing science fiction cinema.

In Part IV, "Sensuous Spaces," Kuhn takes the idea of a "phenomenological metapsychology of cinema," which the previous three chapters addressed in varying degrees, and brings it front and center. Applying this idea directly to diegetic and spectatorial spaces, Kuhn begins to extend "the apparatical metapsychology of cinema, [rethink] the conceptualizations of visibility and looking which underpin it, [and] look to phenomenologies of vision for insights into the ways these spaces are experienced by the spectator" (222). How does science fiction cinema "offer the spectator all-encompassing visual, kinetic and affective experiences" (222)? Garrett Stewart responds to her question by examining the relationship between special effects, photography, the body, and technophobia. Scott Bukatman, in an essay which appropriately concludes the book, discusses special effects and the sublime, arguing that science fiction films are the most recent form of popular entertainment which depend on technologies of vision to provide viewers "adventures of perception . . . , a sense of bodily immersion in a virtual space . . . , and scopic mastery" (223). Such a position of subjectivity engenders the sublime: "experiences calculated to inspire awe, deep reverence or lofty emotion by reason of beauty, vastness or grandeur" (224). These two essays firmly demonstrate the importance and value of Kuhn's interest in the "spaces of science fiction cinema" as a phenomenological and sensual viewing experience, not dependent on iconography, narrative, character, and theme—the traditional elements of genre studies.

As genres and genre studies evolve, the unique cinematic address now associated with science fiction films (special effects technology and the various "spaces" it creates) will most likely need re-evaluation. In fact, a number of recent films already suggest that the phenomenology of vision associated with special effects can no longer distinguish science fiction cinema from other genres. *Twister* (1996), *Titanic* (1997), *Gladiator* (2000), and *The Perfect Storm* (2000) are as much about technology, the sublime, adventures of perception, bodily immersion in a virtual space, and scopic mastery as any spectacular science fiction film. Until this newest arena can be explored, Annette Kuhn's *Alien Zone II* will stand as the benchmark of contemporary science fiction criticism.

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Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!

A History of Exploitation Films, 1919–1959

By Eric Schaefer. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999. $64.95 cloth; $21.95 paper.

Early in *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!,* Eric Schaefer quotes Peter Stallybrass and Allon White: "What is socially peripheral is so frequently symbolically central" (13). As Schaefer points out, that certainly seems to be true of exploitation films—the socially peripheral pictures that have always shown an uncanny knack for "exploiting" symbolically central elements which mainstream Hollywood considers taboo. Exploitation's essence was "any subject that was forbidden: miscegenation, abortion, unwed motherhood, venereal disease. . . . All those subjects were fair game for the exploiteer—as long as it was in bad taste!" (3). But while most of us know exploitation films as the cheaply made genre movies produced by groups like American International Pictures during the 1950s and 60s and marketed to a largely teen audience, Schaefer's history covers a much larger exploitation terrain. "Exploitation became a recognized and distinct category of motion picture during the 1920s," writes Schaefer (3), and its history "roughly paralleled the rise and fall of the classical Hollywood cinema" (8). It is a "link to the motion picture's formative years," and its role in the formulation of certain social and institutional policy has unfortunately gone largely ignored (340). Clearly, the book's intention is to open a public space in which exploitation's social and institutional role can be explored.

The book is organized into two sections. The first part gives us an industrial history. Here Schaefer discusses the origins of exploitation films, their mode of production and the effect this had on their cinematic style, and the relationship between the exploiteers and the censors. The second part of the book examines the major categories and subgenres of exploitation films: sex-hygiene movies; drug movies; vice, exotic, and atrocity pictures; and finally, nudie and burlesque features. The book concludes with a discussion of some of the factors which led to the decline and eventual disappearance of classical exploitation films. Throughout, Schaefer is careful to document the way in which these pictures participated in a broader social discourse about the topics they covered, and to situate them historically within the film business itself. In that sense, the book is as much about the history of prudery and social unease in the United States as it is about exploitation films. This gives the overall volume a rich tone as Schaefer moves from the sensational hyperbole used to sell exploitation movies to the censorious tone frequently employed by the mainstream press. In fact, one of the saddest aspects of the book is the way it reveals,

again and again, the degree to which sexual knowledge has been regarded as dangerous in this country. Many women attended the early sex-hygiene films, Schaefer tells us, particularly those about childbirth, simply to get information —information which they presumably could not obtain from the family doctor or library (124). And the problems of venereal disease were, as he points out, "exacerbated by what came to be known as the 'conspiracy of silence'"—a conspiracy which left "education" on the topic in the hands of playwrights, filmmakers, and exploiteers (21).

This is not to say that Schaefer presents exploitation solely as a subversive or progressive genre. The book is best when it delineates the degree to which exploitation films were both transgressive and conservative. Venereal disease films, for example, betrayed powerful class anxieties, as they inevitably depicted a contagion which originated in the lower classes and infected innocent women and children of the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, discourse about venereal disease was inevitably bound up with discussions of eugenics, a topic which only became unpopular after Hitler's rise to power seemed to link it to the social agenda of the enemy camp. Similarly, the onscreen demonization of drug use and drug users was closely connected to anti-Chinese racism and xenophobia in the early part of the century; miscegenation films and exotic jungle films are often astonishingly racist. If exploitation films at times served a genuinely educational function and seemed to argue for a socially progressive informational strategy, they also enforced a rigidly conservative social ideology. "The messages," as Schaefer tells us, "were often complex and contradictory" (165), and he does a good job of laying out just exactly how complex and contradictory they were.

In addition to providing useful cultural and social data, the book includes some excellent discussion of classical Hollywood history. The chapter on the Hays Code is particularly good, as it explores the "central role that exploitation films played in the formulation and maintenance of censorship and self-regulatory policies," a role which, as Schaefer points out, has largely been ignored (138). Many of the Hays Office policies were drafted as much to eliminate exploitation films as to regulate mainstream cinematic fare. Ironically, however, the Hays Code only served to clarify the parameters of exploitation genres. Anything forbidden by the code became grist for the exploitation mill, and the code itself ensured there would always be an audience for "different" movies. After the Hays Code was enacted, exploitation films became increasingly sensational, and any lingering connections with early "education" movies were soon dropped. While the pictures still included a "square-up"—a scientific or moralistic prologue spoken by an actor dressed as a doctor or scientist—the films (and the prologues) no longer made any attempt to include factual information about birth control, drug use, or venereal disease. As Schaefer points out, one of the ironic consequences of the Hays Code was the creation of a clear niche market for the very films that Joseph Breen and Will Hays wanted to remove from circulation.

No book is perfect, of course, and one of the imperfections of this book is that its central unifying argument at times needs bolstering. I'm not always convinced that individual films or genres present one more example of the anxiety of a society making the transition from a production-based economy to a consumer-based economy, although I do find the idea compelling. Similarly, Schaefer's critique of feminist film theory needs elaboration. But these are minor criticisms of a book which does so much so thoroughly and so well.

As a final note, this book is an invaluable resource for anyone working in the area of exploitation or other "low" genre films. Schaefer notes in the introduction that there aren't many written resources available in this area, and much of his data about the conditions under which films were made and shown comes from personal interviews, diaries, letters, and old business files. As a result, the book pulls together a wealth of information, and Schaefer has provided a valuable service in simply making it all available. The filmography alone is well worth the price of admission, and the list of distributors will make life much easier for many scholars working in this field. But as I've tried to show, the book isn't intended solely for scholars. The lack of theoretical jargon makes this a highly user-friendly book for anyone interested in the topic. It's both a richly informative resource and, and as one friend puts it, "a thumping good read."

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The British Cinema Book.

Edited by Robert Murphy. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press/BFI, 1997. $60.00 cloth; $24.95 paper.

Robert Murphy begins his introduction to *The British Cinema Book* by telling us that "British cinema has been despised and disparaged for much of its existence." A few pages later, Charles Barr begins his opening essay with the remark that "no British feature films from the silent era belong to an internationally known repertoire." A few pages after that, Lawrence Napper notes that "since its inception with *Close Up* in 1927, serious film criticism in Britain has displayed an almost unseemly passion for denigrating the British film." Later yet, Erik Hedling points out that "until recently, British cinema tended to be overlooked by scholars." Finally, a few pages from the end, Alan Lovell says that "British cinema has been heavily marked by qualities like good taste, restraint, reticence." So despite a new self-confidence in both British film production and British film studies, we cannot say that the long-established idea of the poverty of British cinema has yet been left behind.

Some contributors to *The British Cinema Book* (Sarah Street, Tom Ryall, Vincent Porter, Allan Eyles) write histories of policy, of production, and of exhibition, while others (Lawrence Napper, Ian Conrich, Marcia Landy, Sue Harper) look to music hall, to horror, to women's pictures, and to costume films in search of what Ryall calls "a distinctive cinema of national identity," different from, but just as valid as, the canonical British cinema. Others yet (Ian Aitken, Tom

Pulleine, Geoff Brown) re-examine that canonical cinema, looking at Griersonian documentary, Ealing comedy, and 60s realism. Thus the older, more dismissive idea of British cinema is not treated explicitly, as a cultural symptom to be analyzed, but implicitly, as a scholarly oversight to be corrected. But if it is true that British cinema has historically been belittled, then surely the reasons why are worth considering. Economic historians place the beginning of the decline of Britain at the moment of the second industrial revolution at the end of the nineteenth century, and cinema is of course a technology born of that revolution. Does this coincidence inform the failure of British cinema to compete aesthetically with France, Germany, Russia, and the United States during the silent period? And at the other end of the century of cinema, to what extent is the current upsurge of critical interest attendant on the most recent "renaissance" in British filmmaking, and to what extent is it reflective of a period in which the meaning "British" has been complicated by resurgent national consciousness in Scotland and Wales, by 30 years of low-intensity war in Northern Ireland, by a continuing discussion of the place of Britain in Europe, and by the new cultures of black and Asian Britishness?

Despite a Part Two in which topics such as censorship and black representation take over from Part One's treatment of more specific historical moments, *The British Cinema Book* is not at its best with these kinds of questions. It does better with things like the number of cinemas in depression-era Bolton, the postwar appeal to female audiences of aristocratic male leads with sadistic streaks, and the number of British films shown on television in 1994. In other words, this is a volume of localized insight rather than synoptic vision, of worthwhile research within established parameters rather than intellectual pathbreaking. In particular, it is hard not to feel that the definitions of both "British" and "cinema" are taken too much for granted. The book does very little with Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, but fails to enter even the standard caveat about the equation of "British" with "English." And though Michael O'Pray has found 60 years of material for a collection on the English avant-garde, *The British Cinema Book* is silent on this, tacitly equating cinema with the production of narrative features.

Collating comments from Iris Barry in 1926, Alfred Hitchcock in 1968, Rachel Low in 1971, and James Park in 1990, Charles Barr summarizes the traditional critique of British cinema: "The complaints fit together to create a sense of a total filmic system that is ponderous and literal-minded. The common criticism is of a failure to rethink material in film terms, or to consider what 'film terms' amount to." As we have seen, contributors to *The British Cinema Book* regularly acknowledge this criticism, yet rather than directly tackling it, they finesse it by proceeding in historical, cultural, and sociological terms. One consequence is that the book contains few detailed readings of specific films. Charles Barr, it is true, goes shot-by-shot through the Hepworth company's 1905 *Rescued by Rover,* while Raymond Durgnat offers a typology of dozens of crime films made between 1945 and 1949. For most contributors, however, films serve as examples or illustrations of a point about a period, a genre, a studio, an audience fraction, or a chain of theaters. Even so, some changes in the established canon of British cinema are discernible; alongside the familar lineup of *Granton Trawler, Brief Encounter,* and *Passport to Pimlico,* there are discussions of Gainsborough melodramas such as *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (Arthur Crabtree, 1944), films noir such as *They Made Me a Fugitive* (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1947), and period pieces such as *The Wicked Lady* (Leslie Arliss, 1945).

This list of titles from the 1940s makes clear that the bulk of contributions cluster at mid-century, reaching back to the 1930s and forward to the 1960s, with only Charles Barr looking at early cinema, and only John Hill to account for the last quarter-century of film history. Barr proposes that the English pioneers were the equals of the French, the Germans, and the Americans; and Erik Hedling argues that "British directors—Jarman, Greenaway, Davies, Loach, Leigh—have at last been admitted to the pantheon of European art cinema." If both are right—if, that is, the most aesthetically significant achievements of British cinema come at the beginning and the end of film history—then the bulk of contributions to this book are devoted to the period in which British cinema struggled for artistic credibility. In other words, this is a volume valuable more for the worth of its individual contributions than for its questioning of the received conception of British cinema.

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Differences in the Dark

American Movies and English Theater

By Michael T. Gilmore. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. $22.50.

Try substituting "cinema" for "theater" in the following passage, and see if it touches a nerve. "People think they come together in the theater, and it is there that they are isolated. It is there that they go to forget their friends, neighbors and relations in order to concern themselves with fables, to cry for the misfortunes of the dead, or to laugh at the expense of the living." It is not surprising that these words, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Lettre à M. d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1759), ring like a bell through Michael T. Gilmore's *Differences in the Dark*. If theater audiences' unhappy dispersal in the dark encourages passivity and privatization, as Rousseau thinks, then surely film isolates its audiences even more severely by encouraging identification not with live actors performing roles but with insentient moving images, simulacra imprinted on celluloid acetate. If the art of the actor is that of counterfeit, as Rousseau insists, stage actors are nevertheless flesh-and-blood human beings who are present to their audience and can return their gaze. Film actors, on the other hand, can—as Panofsky, Balázs, and others have pointed out—establish a consubstantiality not between actor and audience but between performer and character performed. Paradoxes abound. Harrison Ford (as an unknown) was mobbed

by teenagers in a record store the day *Star Wars* opened; Laurence Olivier at the height of his fame would pride himself on his ability to travel round London unrecognized.

Nor do the paradoxes to which Gilmore is sensitive end here. On the one hand, cinema audiences have become reluctant to accept films as records of performances, which is why that hybrid form, the filmed play (or opera) is almost always execrable from a cinematic point of view. On the other hand, films age or become dated, whereas plays can take on a new life. A second version of a film is called a "remake," something that is done over; the comparable term in the theater is "revival," the resuscitation of what can "live" only in "live" performance. While this point has been made before, Gilmore is too good a historian to take it at face value. Instead, he makes the fascinating move of pointing out that "the drift towards impersonality and self-enclosure, which is characteristic of the cinema" (and of twentieth-century aesthetic modernism in general) is one that originated not in the cinema but on the stage. "Before (roughly) the 1860s or 1870s, English plays were marked by a high degree of performer-audience interaction." An example of this interaction (though Gilmore does not mention it) can be seen in the London Palladium sequences of Hitchcock's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. The Palladium is a music hall, not a theater, but we can watch its audience react viscerally to what is on stage. We must perforce do so as members of a film audience who could scarcely be expected to respond to what we are seeing in anything like the same way. When American cinema severed itself from its low-life, vaudevillian origins—and it did so notably when it exhibited D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*—it was recapitulating a shift already made in theatrical convention.

"The stage embraced the distance and the heightened artifice that became the signature of the movies" only after the 1860s; "by the 1870s, houselights got darkened, hubbub gave way to respectful silence, intimacy to spatial partition." Originally, as Gilmore reminds us, the stage was a rostrum, an apron. In what was called the "point," the actor would advance among and directly declaim to his audience, who in turn would commonly exercise their right to an instant encore—just as concert-goers in Beethoven's day would frequently exercise that same right even to an encore of a movement of a symphony. Audience discipline of the kind enforced today in the theater by decorum, or in your neighborhood multiplex by over-loud Dolby sound systems, is a historical construct that was constructed more than once.

After the 1870s, actors could no longer approach the audience because of changes in stage design. They retreated behind the gilded proscenium; the "point" did not survive. Actors only then began to behave as if the audience were the legendary "fourth wall," betraying no awareness that they were being watched. In this way, the injunction never to look at the camera, a mainstay of Hollywood, preceded Hollywood's existence. Drama had already become inviolable spectacle. Everything that mattered transpired on the other side of the footlights, a border no audience member could overstep. The stage was set (so to speak) for most cinemas to carry over from theater architecture a proscenium arch for which there was no longer any real need.

Instead of proffering the usual simple-minded distinction between "the theatrical" and "the cinematic," Gilmore in this fine, eye-opening book convincingly historicizes their overlaps as well as their differences. This means, among other things, that we should not romanticize origins. American movies in Edward Wagenknecht's "age of innocence" were anything but innocent. Monopoly capitalism and racism were present at their very birth, a birth which D.W. Griffith (as Gilmore forcefully reminds us) self-consciously identified with the "birth" of the nation itself. Gilmore identifies Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* as a twentieth-century modernist document as well as a racist epic, with its technological, cinematic, and theatrical celebration of the incorporeal as the linkage between the two. His insights should change the way we think about the film and its context.

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Film and the Anarchist Imagination

By Richard Porton. New York: Verso, 1999. $66.00 cloth; $22.00 paper.

Richard Porton's *Film and the Anarchist Imagination* is a landmark work in more ways than one. Most obviously, it is the first work to look at how world cinema has handled anarchist ideology and anarchist characters. Adding considerable distinction to this theme is the fact that Porton is as familiar with anarchist history and ideology as he is with film history and film theory. This double expertise shows on each page. The political and aesthetic judgments do not vie with each other, but serve as dual means to explore how successful a film has been in its expression of anarchist values. Although he does not attempt to be encyclopedic in terms of including every film with anarchist interest, Porton touches on scores of films from every time period and succeeds in establishing various anarchist categories and sensibilities that have emerged or failed to emerge in cinema.

Porton's major thesis is that most filmmakers do not consider anarchism to be a coherent political perspective. Consequently, anarchist characters usually appear on the screen as stereotypical terrorists better explained by abnormal psychology than political ideology. "Propaganda of the deed," an anarchist idea of great currency in the nineteenth century, lends this image a certain amount of historic reality, resulting in what Porton describes as "a common romantic tendency to associate anarchism with grandiloquent, if foolhardy, gestures." An illustration offered by Porton of such reductionism is Edwin Porter's *Execution of Czologsz with Panorama of Auburn Prison* (1901). Purporting to be a dramatic reenactment of the electrocution of President McKinley's assassin, the film depoliticizes Czologsz, who in reality was quite sophisticated ideologically. Porton is less concerned with historical accuracy here than with the distortion of the motivations and character of the assassin. These

distortions obscure the nature of anarchist discourse in the United States at that time and totally ignore the considerable discussion in anarchist circles about when, if ever, violence is an appropriate response to injustice.

Porton's treatment of anarchism during various film periods begins with some of the earliest films of the silent era, such as D. W. Griffith's *The Voice of the Violin* (1909), and the impact of literary works such as Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1895). The film being analyzed is always put into its cinematic as well as its social context. Thus, Porton's treatment of films such as Lina Wertmuller's *Love and Anarchy* (1973) and Claude Chabrol's *Nada* (1974) demonstrates how in that particular period the anarchist milieu was often treated as an elaboration or variation of the sexual underground. His coverage ends in the mid-1990s with films as varied as Kenneth Loach's *Land and Freedom* (1995) and Agnieszka Holland's *Total Eclipse* (1995), the first breaking with stereotypes and the second reinforcing them.

Four feature films that Porton finds responsible in their treatment of various anarchist views are the just noted *Land and Freedom, Rebellion in Patagonia* (1974), *Alexander the Great* (1983), and *Viva Zapata* (1952). *Land and Freedom* focuses on the Spanish Civil War of the late 1930s, when anarchism was a mass movement seeking to transform existing social relationships. The film clearly differentiates anarchist views, and even the anarchist personality, from authoritarian rivals—in this case, the Communists. Hector Olivera's lesser-known *Rebellion in Patagonia* deals with a turn-of-the century rebellion in Argentina. The anarchists in that rebellion disdain the commandism of the traditional left. Instead, they follow the principle of always making decisions through a community vote. The key plot element turns on what individual anarchists do when their fellow workers vote to take actions that the anarchists consider suicidal.

Theo Angelopoulos' *Alexander the Great* (referring to a nineteenth-century bandit, not the classic general) depicts the struggle between a leftist guerrilla band and an anarchist commune in rural Greece at the end of the nineteenth century. The incident, only loosely based on actual events, probes the tension between hierarchical and non-hierarchical revolt. Unlike the set speeches that develop the themes of the other films mentioned here, Angelopoulos uses music, complex characterizations, and visual effects to make the anti-authoritarian argument.

In regard to *Viva Zapata* (1954), Porton observes that director Elia Kazan and scriptwriter John Steinbeck wished to demonstrate that filmmakers could take socially progressive, even revolutionary, political stands in their work while being resolutely anti-Communist. This, of course, reflected their personal responses to Stalinism and prefigures Kazan's friendly testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Although the film's historical details are often erroneous, Porton judges that the emphasis on Zapata's refusal to take state power and his denunciation of a would-be leftist bureaucrat captures the spirit of a peasant leader, who in fact had anarchist advisors, in a revolt in which anarchism was a leading ideology.

Complicating these discussions is Porton's decision not to outline basic anarchist views in his introduction or to locate his own position within that discussion. Many readers may find this troublesome at times. References to anarchists such as Kropotkin, Bakunin, Proudhon, Makhnov, Durrutti, and Lafargue appear as frequently as references to filmmakers such as Bresson, Godard, Dziga-Vertov, Resnais, and Tanner, and citations from Foucault, Derrida, and Adorno. The ways in which anarchism differs from other ideologies only emerge indirectly from the discussion of the individual films in a kind of intellectual osmosis.

Porton tends to present his judgments by approvingly quoting an authoritative source rather than through direct expression. Those views are most apparent in his discussion of American documentaries. Joel Sucher and Seven Fischler's *Anarchism in America* (1981) gets extensive discussion as an example of the perils of self-representation and the difficulty of dealing with a movement that has rarely enjoyed a mass base. Porton chides the filmmakers for an "often troublesome reluctance to offend." He considers their earlier work, *Freie Arbeiter Stimme* (*Free Voice of Labor,* 1980), as more courageous in presenting anarchist views that might not be popular with mainstream viewers. Nonetheless, he considers both films to be "useful to audiences who view them with informed caution." He also is critically appreciative of Stewart Bird and Deborah Shaffer's *The Wobblies* (1979), but thinks that the film, like many radical documentaries of the 1970s, is much more nostalgic than it is militant. Another film of that era positively noted is Mauro Bolognini's *Metello* (1970), which is used to open a discussion of the anarchist refusal to make work a virtue—a theme also found in René Clair's *A nous la liberté* (1931), which is analyzed at length.

The aesthetic arguments Porton mounts will be more readily accessible to most readers than his political reference points. Most interesting in this regard is his final essay dealing with "the elusive anarchist aesthetic." Porton refuses to accept the formlessness or spontaneity of some avant-garde films as necessarily or automatically being anarchist. Rather, he offers a close look at Buñuel's *L'Age d'or* and the views of thinkers such as the Situationists, Dwight Macdonald, and Paul Goodman. Also pertinent to this discussion is his sympathetic consideration of the work of Jean Vigo. Porton notes that if a film has to be anarchist in plot, form, and images to be regarded as anarchist fare, very few films will ever qualify. Not least of the problems posed by such criteria, as his work amply demonstrates, is the difficulty in establishing what constitutes an anarchist plot, form, character, or image. Moreover, such definitions are in constant flux. Anarchist films, Porton suggests, might be more usefully defined as films made with the kind of sensibility he has sought to identify in his exhaustive study.

Film and the Anarchist Imagination is an indispensable starting point for anyone wishing to consider the interaction between anarchism and cinema. Porton's intellectual rigor and political passion are sure to illicit strong responses from those who will disagree with his interpretation of specific films or who will have their own lists of successes and failures, including little-known films that need to be reexamined. That

reactions of this kind can be expected is just one indication of the high standard Porton has set in this pioneering work.

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Swinging Single

Representing Sexuality in the 1960s

Edited by Hilary Radner and Moya Luckett. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. $19.95.

Swinging Single is not merely a collection of loosely connected essays united only by their concern with 1960s sexual representation. This volume of scrupulously researched, painstakingly argued cultural studies pieces coheres around a central ideological position that Hilary Radner articulates in her provocative discussion of Helen Gurley Brown's "single girl." Doubling as the introductory essay to *Swinging Single,* Radner's piece declares,

> This volume elucidates the ways in which it was not the politics of 1960s activism that wrought changes in the contemporary social fabric, changes now associated with the 1960s. Rather, it was popular culture itself, far from resisting change, that posited the personal rather than the political as the new primary arena of experience and citizenship. . . . This discourse encouraged the individual to realize his or her "self" in the pursuit of pleasure, a pleasure that was first and foremost sexual. (2)

Radner goes on to note that once sexuality was redefined as primarily a source of pleasure to the individual, rather than an activity that needed to be constrained by the requirements of procreation within a monogamous, heterosexual, state-sanctioned union, the agent of that pleasure could much more readily be imagined as a person of the same sex, or of a different race, or even oneself. Thus, in the sense of divorcing sexual pleasure from the regime of the bourgeois family, the 60s "queered out" the individual in a number of different ways.

The essays in the book reveal how this particular sexual revolution manifested itself during the decade. Two particular tropes emerge. One posits a reframing and resituating of the audience for cinema so that representational practices once solitary, hidden, underground, or marginal leap into full view of a larger community. Janet Staiger's history of the avant-garde underground cinema in New York, Justin Wyatt's analysis of the marketing strategies for adult films, Mark Jordan's reflections on the conflicted attempts to make visible an identifiable homophile/homosexual identity, and Eithne Johnson's description of the advent of the "beaver" film all document this phenomenon with thoroughness and insight.

As the popular culture made visible a far more heterogeneous mix of sexualities, many apparent binary oppositions bumped up against each other, forming unlikely metonymies and connections. Thus, throughout *Swinging Single* we encounter such unlikely pairings as Hugh Hefner and Charles Manson (courtesy of Jeffrey Sconce), Black Panthers and white Yippies (Leerom Medevoi), NASA scientists and Barbarella (Lisa Parks), Emma Peel and Allison MacKenzie (Moya Luckett). Staiger shows us Susan Sontag defending *Flaming Creatures,* while Andrew Sarris is offended by camp playfulness infiltrating the high-art avant-garde. Such odd couples and odd couplings—let's not forget that the Neil Simon play and film were 60s products too—are the most fascinating revelations to be found among the cultural materials given such expert scrutiny in the book's densely packed 346 pages of text.

Although all the essays are compelling in their own ways, the particular strengths of *Swinging Single* may be best exemplified in Eithne Johnson's piece, which traces the inverse symmetry between the "coloscopic" films made by Masters and Johnson, which used a plastic "penis-camera" to record female autoerotic orgasms from the inside, and the "beaver" films that allowed male spectators situated on the outside to catch glimpses of that hidden realm. "Given the public attention to the sexology laboratory as a scene of sex film production," Johnson says, "I suggest that the 'beaver' film's transition to public exhibition symptomatically represents, on the one hand, a popular negotiation of the sexologists' claim that the female body is sexually 'responsive' and, on the other hand, a resistance to the nonpictorial physiological imagery privileged by scientific sexologists" (303). Documenting the beaver film's stylistic resemblance to both home movies and live striptease, and its function as parody of scientific sexology, Johnson concludes that its representations of female sexuality offered a "scene of pleasure" where a woman could be free of "both the demands of reproduction and the supervision of a scientific gaze" (318). Leave it to "beaver!"

This female sexual subject, one of the variants on Helen Gurley Brown's single girl, is presented, as I have noted, as the volume's heroine, the most significant product of all the various 60s liberation movements. It is this teleological focus of *Swinging Single* that calls forth my only slight reservation about the book. In keeping with their ideological project, Radner and Luckett divide the volume into two sections, "Impossible Men" and "The New Femininity Unveiled." All the essays in the first section, save Janet Staiger's, are written by men; all the essays in the second section are written by women. Radner states in the introduction that the "general optimism" of the essays on the new femininity offer "a striking contrast to the general pessimism of the essays in Part I." The implication is clear: the playboy/free-love hippie male lost the 60s, while the single girl won. Even if that were unequivocally the case, and I don't think it is, the schema renders the volume's organization less successful than it might otherwise be. Staiger's and Wyatt's histories of the underground cinema and the adult film industry may not address the production of a new female sexual subject, but they do not focus on masculine self-representation in the way that Medevoi's detailed critique of *Soul on Ice* does, or Mark Jordan's interrogation of 1960s treatises on gay male identity. Moreover, whereas Johnson's essay would place logically alongside Staiger's and Wyatt's, and segue nicely into Mede-

voi's, two of the essays in this section connect far better methodologically with those in Part II.

Amidst the historical and cultural studies approaches to marginalized representations of sexuality, Abdullah Habib Almaani's persuasive, if hardly surprising, psychoanalytic reading of the gender instability surrounding the figure of T.E. Lawrence in David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* is decidedly out of place. Most of the essays on the new femininity, however, do focus on representations of a single individual, either living or fictional, often in mainstream texts, and Almaani's piece would benefit from placement among them. Several of them also examine stars or leading characters, again fitting methodologically with Almaani's approach. Certainly, his reflections on the varying costumes Lawrence donned in crafting his persona find a nice complement in Susan McLeland's consideration of how fashion and accessories established Elizabeth Taylor as Hollywood's last glamour girl. Likewise, Sconce's perceptive riff on the fascination of "the burgeoning boomer analysis industry" with Charles Manson as simultaneously star, controlling patriarch, and psycho libertine is not out of place in the company of meditations on pop cultural icons such as Taylor, Barbarella, and Emma Peel.

What the arbitrary grouping of essays by gender obscures is the paradox that Radner notes in the passage I cited at the beginning of this review. The "victor" of the various revolutionary movements of the 60s was individual self-fulfillment, irrespective of the individual's gender, sex, or sexual preference; the loser was communitarian and utopian politics. Medevoi's essay poignantly reminds us that the separation of the combined sexual and racial liberation called for in "the troubled Yippie-Panther pipe dream" leaves us without a suitable discourse to address, for instance, the plight of unwed mothers of color. While it is heartening to consider the escape into visibility and selfhood by those who were either excluded from or oppressed by the model of the hetero-normative bourgeois family, and while we would never want to relinquish the liberated consciousness that enables Erica Rand's against-the-grain reading of gendered behavior in a 60s adolescent novel, it is depressing to realize how far we are from heeding the refrain of one of the anthems of the period: "Come on people now/smile on your brother/everybody get together/try to love one another/right now."

Moreover, the most privileged figure going into the 60s has emerged fairly unscathed during the rest of the twentieth century. The heterosexual male may have to share the spotlight a bit more these days, but he's hardly been booted off the stage. The Bond girl may well be "unbonded," as Radner observes, finally able to reap the benefits of her well-invested bodily capital, in the same way that Parks describes Barbarella using her own sexuality as a form of technology. But the impression implied by Austin Powers' camp resurrection that James Bond might have gone into cold storage after the 60s is quite misleading. On our movie screens, and in the pop-culture consciousness they mirror, James Bond has never left us.

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